

From a “great tree” to a new *Dawn*: Race, ethnogenesis, and indigeneity in southern New
England

by

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B.S., University of Rhode Island, 2002
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The Narragansett leader Miantinomi once explained to European settlers that his people were as a great tree when other tribes in the region were mere twigs. But in the years, decades, and centuries that followed the proclamation the authority and dominion claimed by Indians was reduced significantly, and the Narragansetts were left searching for a new dawn in which the continuation and relevancy of their community might be affirmed.

This study traces the historical persistence of the Narragansetts by exploring how the Indians, at times, shifted the composition of their community in a process scholars refer to as ethnogenesis—the repeated reforming and reshaping of Native societies. This work shows that how the Narragansetts conceptualized and expressed evolutions within their community sometimes conflicted with the definitions and expectations of their non-indigenous neighbors, thus, creating interpretive conflicts that, in time, inspired challenges to the authenticity of the Narragansetts. Finally, this work examines how the dictates of others—whether the Indians sought to comply or not—eventually informed how many Narragansetts understood and professed their distinctive yet evolving identity as indigenous persons.

According to an interpretation that remained unchallenged for close to three centuries, on 19 December 1676, the Narragansetts suffered a debilitating defeat when a regiment under the direction of the United Colonies—a military alliance comprised of soldiers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Plymouth—marched into southern Rhode Island and valiantly subdued what had been a belligerent and bellicose tribe. The demographic, social, political, cultural, and economic consequences of the loss left the Narragansetts reeling until 1880 when state officials finally and compassionately detribalized the Narragansetts.

Although this false narrative explaining the supposed demise of southern New England's principal indigenous community was specific, it was not unique. Accounts proclaiming the disappearance of Native peoples were used to affirm Euro-American claims to land throughout North America. When coupled with what Jean O'Brien has termed replacement narratives—chronicles designed to diminish the historical significance of Indian communities—accounts proclaiming the seemingly natural demise of Indigenous peoples have enabled English colonists and later American citizens to reap the rewards of a landscape seemingly devoid of indigenous persons while avoiding the territorial, legal, and ethical complications their presence and persistence would have created.

Despite the preponderance of evidence found in more recent scholarship which lays bare the fallacies associated with what Phillip Deloria has referred to as the myth of the vanishing Indian, the falsehoods purporting the demise and disappearance of the Narragansetts remain mostly intractable in local lore. This may be due to the fact that public recognition of the continued existence of Rhode Island's once-vibrant indigenous population portends tremendous economic and territorial consequence for a state comprised entirely of land originally claimed by the Narragansetts. Within this context, it is not difficult to understand why some Rhode Islanders remain reluctant to acknowledge the persistence of the Narragansetts as a community. Instead—as non-Indians in the region have done for hundreds of years—many contemporary Rhode Islanders continue to challenge the racial, cultural, and historical authenticity of those who purport to be descended from the great tree.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of Anna Torres Key, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and love remains both cherished and missed.



Figure 1 Colonial Map of New England. Reprinted from "New England Colonies in 1677." National Geographic Society. April 18, 2013.

Preface – The Smoke-Shop

"It's a racial discrimination that they [Native Americans] feel is both systemic and also specific . . . that is felt at the individual level."¹

James Anaya, United Nations investigator

On a hot morning in mid-July, a haphazard gathering of Narragansett Indians formed an impromptu human wall to protect what they deemed to be sacred and sovereign tribal land. The disputed territory was located in southern Rhode Island and was part of a rural enclave surrendered to the Narragansetts in a previous settlement between the tribe and state authorities.² On the other side of the roadway, directly across from the assembled group of Indians, stood a few dozen officers from the local police department and more than twenty state troopers. The officers had direct orders from the governor of Rhode Island Donald L. Carcieri to enter the property and forcibly close a smoke shop that the state claimed the Indians were operating illegally. Tensions were high as the two sides remained resolute in the belief that the moral and legal right resided on their side of the road. Hence, the ugly and violent melee that ensued as the officers advanced to close the shop seemed almost inevitable and was reminiscent of an earlier era when federal, state, and local leaders attempted to assert their authority over indigenous

¹ James Anaya was appointed special investigator for the United Nations in its 2012 assessment of Native Americans rights. Anaya concluded that “the historical oppression that indigenous peoples have suffered, the taking of their lands, the undermining of their cultures, the taking of their children to boarding schools in order to wean them away from indigenous culture, these have had profound effects on indigenous peoples. There's yet to be a real reckoning of that history and reconciliation.” This study constitutes an attempt to better understand and communicate the conditions, decisions and events that have helped to shape the social, political, cultural, and economic realities faced by many indigenous peoples including members of the Narragansett Indian Tribe.

² “Joint Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Settlement of the Rhode Island Indian Land Claims,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed June 14, 2017, <file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/1978%20June%201,%20Land%20Claim%20Settlement%20Agreement.pdf>.

peoples aggressively.³ But the altercation that took place on July 14th was not an episode born out of the Indian wars of the nineteenth-century. Instead, this incident occurred in 2003, during an age of live video feeds and twenty-four-hour cable news. The story and images of the clash between the Narragansetts and the police were broadcast worldwide by the Cable News Network (CNN). Among other images, audiences witnessed officers being choked, and tribal members (including women and children) slammed violently to the ground. The events of that day and—perhaps more importantly—the images they generated prompted viewers to question why this embarrassing episode had even taken place.

In response to the growing criticism over the state's approach to dealing with the Narragansetts, Governor Carcieri established a committee to “independently review the facts and circumstances leading up to and surrounding” the state police raid on the Narragansett Indian smoke shop.⁴ A few of the findings issued in the committee's final report help to illustrate the continued importance and relevance of the quires that inform this study. Because, to comprehend why the Narragansetts and state officials were primed for violence, one must first appreciate the history behind what were deeply-rooted and longstanding animosities.

In its final report, the review committee established by the governor asserted that there was a severe discrepancy between the "risk level assessment" and the outsized number of officers deployed by state and local leaders. The committee found the overwhelming force dispatched by the state was inappropriate and only helped to inflame hostilities. But why did leaders decide to employ such a large and heavily armed force to shut down the smoke shop?

³ Pauline Turner Strong, *American Indians and the American Imaginary: Cultural Representations across the Centuries* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013), 27.

⁴ “Executive Summary: Report of The Independent Committee on the July 14, 2003, Narragansett Smoke Shop Incident,” Brown University, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/2003-04/03-037.html.

Answering this question reveals a broader reality which lays bare the crux of an enduring divide between the Narragansetts and many of their neighbors. Indeed, as the two sides aligned themselves and prepared for a faceoff, there was more than just a road that separated them.

For almost 400 years the cross-cultural interactions between the Narragansetts and their non-Indigenous neighbors remained mostly adversarial.⁵ It was within this historical context that the Indians and officers clashed as centuries of hostilities worked to harden hearts, minds, and viewpoints. Thus, on that summer morning in mid-July, each side was willing to assert the veracity of their historical conceptualizations violently. For Rhode Island's leaders, the opening of the smoke shop constituted a blatant and illegal power grab by the Narragansetts. In fact, much of the state's citizenry saw the altercation as just the latest flashpoint in a long history of overreaches by a mostly inconsequential people who were defeated long ago but who refused to accept the consequences and realities associated with that loss.

An editorial published in the *Providence Journal*—the principal periodical for the state of Rhode Island—the day after the raid on the smoke shop was indicative of the view many non-Indians held about the status of the Narragansetts in relation to the authority of the state. The author argued that “tribal members were terribly wrong to resist the state police . . . turning a peaceful exercise of law enforcement into an ugly melee.”⁶ The writer continued to explain that, “No group—even one as historically persecuted as Native Americans—should be free to ignore state laws.”⁷ Governor Carcieri also immediately placed blame upon the tribe and decried the Indians as instigators. In a press conference held soon after the raid, the governor emphatically

⁵ Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts: Diplomacy, War, and the Balance of Power in Seventeenth-Century New England and Indian Country* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 140.

⁶ “The smoke-shop raid,” *Providence Journal*, July 14, 2003.

⁷ *Ibid.*,

condemned the Indians when he stated: "Let me be crystal clear: Today's actions were precipitated by the Narragansett Indians and their flagrant violation of state law...they have knowingly violated our law and have done so with impunity."⁸ This interpretation of the Indians as unruly—perhaps even savage—outlaws informed the decisions and actions of those charged with upholding state law. Within this context, the affront posed by the Narragansetts was intolerable to many officials. Thus, the large contingent of officers dispatched to the grounds of the smoke shop was—at its core—a physical manifestation of the state's authority over the tribe.

In the days following the raid, and due in large part to the violent images of the confrontation broadcasted worldwide, many began to challenge the veracity of the state's interpretation. "With national attention on the melee between state police and the Narragansett Indians," begins an article authored by multiple staff writers for *The Providence Journal*, "Governor Carcieri yesterday backed away from wholly blaming the tribe and ordered two investigations into the state's actions."⁹ Apparently, culpability for the altercation was not as "crystal clear" as the governor and editors of *The Providence Journal* had once suggested. For their part, many of the Narragansetts did not interpret the opening of the smoke shop as a flaunting of state authority. Instead, the Indians saw the establishment of the shop as almost an act of desperation. For centuries the Narragansetts have remained among Rhode Island's most economically disadvantaged group.¹⁰ And for some of the Indians, this was no accident. Paula

⁸ "Carcieri: Raid was regrettable but necessary," *Providence Journal*, July 16, 2003, A-9.

⁹ Mark Arsenault et al. "Governor apologizes to those injured," *The Providence Journal*, July 16, 2003, A-1

¹⁰ "Minority health facts Native Americans in Rhode Island 2015," Rhode Island Department of Health, accessed June 13, 2017,

<http://health.ri.gov/publications/factsheets/minorityhealthfacts/NativeAmericans.pdf>.

According to the Rhode Island Department of Health in 2015, the household income for Native Americans was about one-third that of the state's white population.

Dove-Jennings—a member of the Narragansett tribal council—was indignant as she recounted what she interpreted as some of the state's most egregious trespasses against the tribe. "The state has taken away our religion, our water rights, our language. It's taken away our right to have a casino."¹¹ In the two decades that preceded the raid, the state actively opposed many of the economic endeavors perused by the Narragansetts.¹² This opposition included the passage of a legislative rider attached to an appropriations bill in 1996 that rendered the Narragansetts the only federally recognized tribe barred by Congress from establishing a casino.¹³ It was to this legislation that Dove-Jennings had referred.

These historical realities and their propensity to inform the decisions of contemporaries was acknowledged by the committee when it explained that "The Tribe's conclusion that a smoke shop was the most viable option for revenue can be understood in the context of a long history of conflict with the State."¹⁴ Hence, some Narragansetts saw the smoke shop as perhaps the only available commercial opportunity with the potential to improve the tribe's overall economic condition.¹⁵ Consequently, when the state moved to shut down the shop forcefully, many within the tribal community interpreted this effort as just the current manifestation of a long history in which non-Indians attempted to subdue, marginalize, and even erase the region's

¹¹ "Tribe: The smoke shop opens," *The Providence Journal*, July 13, 2003, Sunday edition.

¹² In 1992 the Narragansett proposal to build a casino under the auspices of the IGRA was opposed by state leaders. In 1996 Senator John Chafee introduced an amendment to the IGRA that nullified the Act as it pertained to the Narragansetts. See Robert A. Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island: Keepers of the Bay* (Charlestown: History Press, 2011), 134-140.

¹³ "Repeal Chafee Rider to Support Restoring IGRA Rights to the Narragansett Tribe," National Congress of American Indians, accessed May 9, 2016, http://www.ncai.org/attachments/Resolution_buDYanHCsyhfXdwrXDLiqJAvlMtFApovgfXbkaPJnnKwGPFbZEi_ftl04-103.pdf.

¹⁴ "Executive Summary."

¹⁵ Wanda Hopkins, Interview conducted by the author, June 10, 2017.

Indigenous inhabitants. “Finally,” began Narragansett Medicine Man Lloyd Wilcox as he addressed a large crowd the day after the raid, “the racism and bigotry in this state has been fully exposed.”¹⁶ For many of the people in attendance that day, the social conditions to which Wilcox referred were pervasive, longstanding, and becoming insufferable. Thus, the Medicine Man's statement met “tremendous applause.”¹⁷ When the officers formed their ranks across from the wall of Narragansetts on the 14th of July, they did so within a social and political atmosphere laden with historical animosities.

Aside from the fact that the Narragansetts and state officials held conflicting interpretations about the intent of the smoke shop, assigning responsibility and blame for the physical confrontation that ensued becomes even more difficult once one considers the fact that the Narragansetts are a federally recognized tribe. This status meant that the Indians held—in theory anyway—a government to government relationship with the state of Rhode Island and not the subordinate role state leaders attempted to assign to the tribe.¹⁸ This was the political framework in which the Indians operated. In fact, on the day of the altercation, Matthew Thomas—Chief Sachem of the Narragansetts—instructed tribal members not to accept the authority of any warrant unless it was a federal warrant. Thomas and many others within the

¹⁶ Mark Arsenault and Katie Mulvaney, “Narragansetts’ chief urges ‘healing’ after police raid,” *The Providence Journal*, July 15, 2003, A-1, A-13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ In *Worcester v. Georgia* the Court held that “The Cherokee Nation, then, is a distinct community occupying its own territory, with boundaries accurately described, in which the laws of Georgia can have no force, and which the citizens of Georgia have no right to enter but with the assent of the Cherokees themselves, or in conformity with treaties and with the acts of Congress. The whole intercourse between the United States and this Nation, is, by our Constitution and laws, vested in the Government of the United States.” With this decision, the court established that Indian Nations were under the jurisdiction of the federal government and not the state. See: Felix S. Cohen, “The Erosion of Indian Rights” (1953). Faculty Scholarship Series. 4354.

https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/4354

tribe apparently believed that—according to the stipulations outlined by the Supreme Court in *Worcester v. Georgia*—as a federally recognized tribe the Narragansetts were only beholden to the authority of the federal government.¹⁹ This also meant that lands held under tribal jurisdiction were not subject to state law. This interpretation was communicated at a news conference held by an exasperated Thomas shortly following the raid. The Narragansett chief fumed that a "couple of things [are] very concerning to us. First of all, to ignore the federal status about the tribe is unacceptable."²⁰ Thomas continued to explain that "the tribe has federal status. And under that federal status, our agreement is with Congress."²¹ However, the state's decision to disregard the sovereignty of the tribe's landholdings was not as flippant as Thomas suggested. Although the status of the tribe was incontrovertible, the land upon which they maintained the smoke shop was not. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of the tribe's landholdings were obtained via a settlement agreement reached with the state of Rhode Island in 1978. This agreement stipulated that the land relinquished by the state to the tribe would remain subject to Rhode Island's laws. But Thomas and many of the Narragansetts operated from an understanding that the federal government's recognition of the tribe in 1983 superseded any earlier agreements reached with state administrators.²² Hence, the ideological and political gulf that existed between the state and the Narragansetts undergirded a seemingly irreconcilable divide that eventually erupted into violence. However, "The parking lot of the smoke shop"—admonished

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ "Chief: Tribe forced to protect sovereignty," *The Providence Journal*, July 16, 2003, A-9.

²¹ Ibid.,

²² This was not unlike the earlier refusals by the leaders of the newly formed state to recognize and abide by the agreements fashioned between the Narragansetts and the region's colonial leaders. See

the review committee charged with investigating the raid—“was not the appropriate forum to address longstanding issues of tribal rights.”²³

Hence, the issues that informed the decisions of the Narragansetts and the officers when they aligned themselves along the roadway were multifaceted and deeply-rooted. At the core of the dispute was not forgone tax revenue, but the legitimacy of a people who sought to assert their autonomy in a state that had for more than a century refused to recognize not only the sovereignty but also—at times—the very existence of the Narragansetts.²⁴ As they watched their adversaries across the street lock arms in defiance, the officers did not recognize the Indians as members of the citizenry they had sworn to protect. Instead, what authorities saw when they looked at the Narragansetts were criminals, usurpers, and imposters. The governor made this interpretation “crystal clear” when he railed about how the Indians had “violated ‘our’ law.” Indeed, the state’s current leadership continued to see the Narragansetts in the same light as had their predecessors because—for centuries—the Indians were not perceived of as part of the general community. Having long been viewed and treated as outcasts, when the Narragansetts aligned themselves to oppose the officers, the Indians also failed to recognize their neighbors. Instead, what tribal members saw when they looked across the roadway was the latest incarnation of an oppressor who had for so long sought to subjugate, marginalize, and—at times—terminate their community. Acknowledging the unique and historical social, political, and economic realities that informed the decisions and actions of those who stood on both sides

²³ “Executive Summary.”

²⁴ In 1880 the state of Rhode Island officially detribalized the Narragansett arguing primarily that the tribe no longer existed. See: “1898 Jan., Opinion of the Supreme Court Relative to Chapter 800 (Narragansett Indians),” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://sos.ri.gov/archon/index.php?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=455&q=Joint+memorandum+>.

of the divide, helps us to better comprehend what precipitated the violence. But even such an appraisal is at best superficial because to understand the complexity of the ideological chasm that existed between the state and the Narragansetts on July 14th, 2003; we must consider the genesis of the animosities that boiled over during the raid.

Introduction – The Black Foxes

The Indians say they have black Foxes, which they have often seene [sic], but never could take any of them: they say they are Maittooes [sic], that is, Gods Spirits or Divine powers.¹
Roger Williams

Put simply, this investigation seeks to understand the Narragansetts as a community. However, the endeavor is not as straightforward as it sounds. The task is complicated by the fact that—like all people—the Narragansetts have evolved as they created and adapted to new realities. Hence, in many ways, understanding who the Narragansetts were at any given moment is analogous to when tribal members saw the black foxes. We can catch glimpses of the Narragansetts but may never be able to capture all of the complexity and nuance associated with that community. Still, the snapshots provided throughout this work offer a vantage point from which to piece together the treads of Narragansett identity.

“Indigenous nations have been composed,” writes anthropologist Pauline Turner Strong, “over time, of shifting and diverse set of persons conceptualized less often as individuals than as members of social groups.” At its core then, this is a study of how those who continued to proclaim their identity as Narragansett Indians shifted the composition of their community over time. This work also reveals how the Narragansetts conceptualized and expressed changes within their community as part of an Indigenous identity. Moreover, this investigation examines the historical realities that helped to create and perpetuate enduring social, political, and economic divisions between the Narragansetts and many of their non-Indigenous neighbors. It illuminates the specific choices made by individuals and groups within the Narragansett community as they contended with the dynamic and often contradictory laws, policies, demands, and expectations of their neighbors. Finally, this study shows how the dictates of others—whether the Indians sought

¹ Roger Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2009) 103.

to comply or not—informed how the Narragansetts understood and professed their distinctive yet evolving identity as Indians.

This study is organized chronologically into five chapters with each chapter exploring a distinct but interrelated aspect of Narragansett identity. Chapter one provides an overview of how chroniclers have interpreted and communicated the experiences of Native Americans in general and the Narragansetts in particular. This chapter traces the historiography to identify how major historical themes have helped to shape the way Indigenous peoples and their actions were interpreted.

Chapter two illuminates how evolving social, political, and cultural conditions influenced periods of ethnogenesis—the repeated reforming and reshaping of Native societies—in southern New England. This section appraises intercultural interactions between white settlers and Indian peoples as the latter sought to restructure and redefine their political, cultural, and social boundaries during a period of increasingly frequent and consequential cross-cultural associations. The chapter also examines how some Indigenous peoples framed intercultural interactions in ways that reaffirmed traditional political, cultural, and social conceptualization.

Chapter three shows that as Europeans gained militaristic, economic, and demographic ascendancy throughout the region, new conceptualizations about the parameters of Indigenous cultural, social, and political identities were used to redefine the Narragansetts in the eyes of the general public. Although the tropes characterizing Native Americans as *forever ancient* and *vanishing* directly contradicted how the Narragansetts had understood and expressed their indigeneity for centuries, these interpretations became self-affirming when Euro-Americans publicly lamented and worked to actively hastened the supposed disappearance of the Narragansetts. The narrative claiming the expiration of the tribe that took shape shortly after

King Phillip's War in 1676, proved enduring and was used to great effect throughout the centuries that followed. By evaluating the realities associated with Rhode Island's efforts to detribalize the Narragansetts in the nineteenth-century, chapter three explores the veracity and utility of the demise narrative. The chapter reveals how the determination of state officials to terminate the collective identity of the Indians was informed more by historical misconceptions than an effort to improve the plight of Rhode Island's Indigenous population through assimilation and inclusion as some have supposed. This study shows how the durable narrative of demise coupled with the political and economic aspirations of members of the white citizenry—and not the actual demographic, cultural, social, or economic conditions of the tribe—led to Rhode Island's official termination of the Narragansetts' collective identity.

Chapter four explores how the Narragansett sought to maintain and reaffirm a group identity in the years following detribalization. This section reveals how the athletic exploits of the Narragansett runner Ellison "Tarzan" Brown ultimately inspired some of Rhode Island's political leaders to officially recognize the Narragansett tribe's continued existence. The chapter illustrates how Brown and some of his Indigenous brethren parlayed the runner's physical accomplishments into meaningful, community-wide social, economic, and political advancements.

Revealing how Narragansett tribal members internalized and endeavored to prove not only their racial authenticity but also the validity of their community, constitutes the interpretative focus of chapter five. The chapter reveals that when some Narragansetts reinterpreted and expressed their indigeneity during the 1930s, certain tribal members also assumed and employed a modality of identity politics that was *monovalent* and reinforced "the

assumption that differences exist between identities but not within an identity.”² Hence, as some Narragansetts sought to authenticate and express their distinctiveness by claiming and accentuating some the identifiers of indigeneity delineated in the mainstream, they also adopted and reinforced the delimiting cultural assumptions and racial stereotypes espoused by the wider community.

The specific actions that created, extended, and protracted the divide that existed between the Indians and state officials are deeply rooted in the past. Those early events continue to hold tremendous significance not only for the Narragansetts and the state of Rhode Island—as evidenced during the raid on the smoke shop—but also for the federal government and its broader policies concerning Indigenous peoples—as evidenced in *Carcieri v. Salazar*.³ When Rhode Island filed suit against the Department of the Interior in an attempt to circumscribe the autonomy of Narragansett landholdings, the state—once again—placed its longstanding struggle with the Indians in a national spotlight. And although the state eventually prevailed, the split decision rendered by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009—which hinged on a narrow interpretation of one word—did little to mediate historic ideological incongruities. At an observance marking the raid’s ten year anniversary, Dove-Jennings lit a small ceremonial fire. When the flames

² Greta Snyder Fowler, “Multivalent Recognition: Between Fixity and Fluidity in Identity Politics,” *The Journal of Politics*, 74 (2012): 254.

³ In *Carcieri v. Salazar* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “because the term ‘now under federal jurisdiction’ in §479 unambiguously refers to those tribes that were under federal jurisdiction when the IRA [Indian Reorganization Act] was enacted in 1934, and because the Narragansett Tribe was not under federal jurisdiction in 1934, the Secretary does not have the authority to take the 31-acre parcel into trust.” The court’s far-reaching decision effectively voided the IRA for any indigenous peoples recognized by the federal government after 1934. The interpretation of “now under jurisdiction” was especially harsh for the “first contact” tribes along the eastern coast who were effectively militarily, demographically, and politically subjugated long before the establishment of The United States of America.

suddenly extinguished themselves, the elder explained that the fire had “gone out because our voices are not being heard.”⁴ This work endeavors to illuminate the historical conditions that precipitated many of the region's enduring misconceptions. Such an aim can only be realized if the often stifled voices of the Narragansetts are allowed to speak. Hence, this work seeks to shed light on perspectives that remain conspicuously absent from a historical discourse that is often invoked, and as such, continues to inform and shape outcomes even in the present day.

Exploring the unique perspectives of Native peoples as they confronted, fashioned, and navigated evolving historical realities is fraught with complications. Many chroniclers fail to incorporate an Indigenous point of view into their works because the voices of Native Americans appear to be absent in the sources most commonly used. Because Native peoples did not write down their interpretations and recollections, writers often rely too heavily upon the accounts of those who did. Therefore, the narratives they produce are incomplete and Eurocentric. However, some authors call attention to the absence of Indigenous viewpoints in historical interpretations and work in novel ways to incorporate the Native voice. For example, the historian Daniel K. Richter suggests that if chroniclers shift their perspectives and “try to view the past in a way that faces east from Indian country” history becomes “much more complicated, much more interesting, and much more revealing.”⁵ Richter explains that including the viewpoints of Indians is not contingent upon the availability of sources produced by Native Americans. Instead, Richter posits that a Native perspective—one that faces east—can be derived from

⁴ Paul Davis, “Narragansetts still angered by smoke-shop raid on 10th anniversary,” Providence Journal.com, accessed June 14, 2017, <http://www.providencejournal.com/breaking-news/content/20130714-narragansetts-still-angered-by-smoke-shop-raid-on-10th-anniversary.ece>.

⁵ Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

sources produced by non-Indigenous peoples through a process of reorientation, reappraisal, and reinterpretation. Such an interpretative shift not only reimagines Indigenous peoples as central actors in North America's long historical drama, but also encourages researchers to explore "how old documents might be read in fresh ways."⁶ Similarly, in her account of Pocahontas, Camilla Townsend employs an east-facing approach to communicate a new perspective on an old and familiar topic. Instead of choosing to convert to English lifeways because of their supposed superiority, Townsend pieces together fragmented historical record and new archeological discoveries to argue that the famous heroine was kidnapped and imprisoned by the newcomers. But hardly an ineffectual victim, Pocahontas used her position to advance the interest of her people choosing to remain Powhatan in the midst of an English world. To better communicate the differing interpretations and perspectives of the Narragansett people—when appropriate—this study applies the analytical approach delineated by Richter and Townsend when evaluating sources produced by nonnatives.

Still, attempting to glean the viewpoints of Indigenous peoples from sources produced outside of—and often in opposition to—Native communities remains a harrowing endeavor. But, as the historians Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman argue, the stories of Native peoples “are worth telling despite the obstacles, for to give up just because the evidence is incomplete, uncertain, or biased is to allow history to remain a story of the victors.”⁷ The investigative techniques utilized by the authors to illuminate the world inhabited by Ninigret—a seventeenth-century Niantic/Narragansett sachem—are instructive. As discussed later in chapter two,

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts: Diplomacy, War, and the Balance of Power in Seventeenth-Century New England and Indian Country* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), xvi.

Ninigret was the tribe's only principle sachem to survive the debilitating struggle that has come to be known as King Phillip's War. The leader and many of his followers endured because Ninigret proclaimed and sought to maintain the neutrality of his people throughout the conflict even—at times—assisting colonial authorities in their fight against the Indian coalition. Through his decisions and actions, Ninigret helped to spare a smaller group of the Indians from the disastrous fate that befell the greater Narragansett community. And it was this contingent that comprised the foundation of the tribe after 1676. However, the Ninigret depicted by Fisher and Silverman “is not colonized, subjugated, converted, or conquered.”⁸ Instead, the sachem “draws on colonialism as it suits him.”⁹ The nuanced interpretation of Ninigret propagated by the authors juxtaposed earlier dichotomies that portrayed the Narragansett leader as either a dutiful friend to the colonists or a tragic Indian leader engaged in a futile resistance to the inevitability of white expansion. An interpretative lens that promotes a deeper appreciation for the agency of Indigenous persons—like that used by Fisher and Silverman—is employed throughout this work.

Moreover, Fisher and Silverman struggled—like all chroniclers who hope to reveal the experiences of earlier Native Americans—with the fact that the records they are left to investigate were primarily fashioned and controlled by Europeans. And as such, the documents these writers produced seldom sought to identify, comprehend, or explain the unique challenges facing Indigenous persons and groups. The authors acknowledge that this incomplete record necessarily leads to a lack of interpretive certainty. However, Fisher and Silverman posit that neglecting the perceptions of Natives because the “story is incomplete would be as misleading as asserting that we know all there is to know.”¹⁰ There are instances in this investigation when the

⁸ Ibid., xiii

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Ibid., xviii-xix

considerations and motivations of principal characters such as Miantonomi and Ellison Brown are not stated specifically in the documentary record. And it is at these points of conjecture that I utilize a similar interpretive approach as that employed by Fisher and Silverman when they sought to communicate the world inhabited by Ninigret. “Rather than avoid questions about Ninigret’s uncertain motivations,” write the authors, “our approach has been to propose his range of choices and suggest his thinking at moments of decision.”¹¹ By making use of the analytical techniques delineated by Fisher and Silverman, this work illuminates conceptualizations about the past that heretofore remain mostly unexplored in the historical discourse. Indeed, the failure to acknowledge and include the interpretations and perspectives of the Narragansetts in a work about the Narragansetts would render this study as deficient as many previous accounts. And although, as Richter and Townsend attest, it is impossible for the modern historian to see the world through the eyes of past peoples, a shift in perspective will allow scholars to look over the shoulders of earlier populaces to better appreciate the world in which they lived.¹²

Along with advocating for both a reorientation of perspective and a multilayered interpretation of Native peoples, historians have recently endeavored to determine the meanings behind and purposes of specific acts of Indigenous agency. Although traditionally viewed in a negative light, the presence, decisions, and actions of Native peoples permeate early accounts and records. Scholars such as Gary Van Valen explain how an interpretive focus on the agency of Indigenous peoples reveals a much more dynamic and complicated past. While discussing the decisions and actions of the Mojo—an Indigenous group living in the Amazon region—he posited that, “by looking through the prism of agency, we can see that the Mojos were not inherently victims

¹¹ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, x.

¹² Richter, *Facing East*, 9.

or powerless in the face of changes imposed by others, and that they would prove to be active participants.”¹³ Indeed, as was true with the Mojo, Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas actively contributed to the shaping of historical realities. Focusing on the agency of the Narragansetts reveals the dynamism of tribal members as they helped fashion social, political, and economic conditions in Rhode Island.

But this study does not simply retell what the Indians did. It also appraises what these actions communicated about the individual and collective interpretations and perceptions of the Narragansetts. Moreover, by using agency as an analytical model, this work shows how certain Narragansetts conceptualized and sought to express their unique perspectives. Revealing what was connoted in the actions of the Natives is accomplished here in two ways. First, to better understand the implications of Narragansett agency, the actions of the Indians must be viewed through a long historical lens. For example, when the Narragansetts attempted to bodily resist Rhode Island’s effort to close the smoke shop, centuries of perceived injustices informed the actions of the Indians. Officials failed to appreciate the historical exigencies that influenced the agency of the Narragansetts, and thus, the heavy-handed approach pursued by the state only made matters worse. Similarly, too many chroniclers of the Narragansetts fail to appreciate the historical conditions that inform and shape many of the decisions made by the Indians. Hence, earlier accounts often fail to express the complexity and totality of the Natives’ experience. Finally, focusing on particular acts of Indigenous agency will enable extrapolation of the cultural milieu that helped to precipitate various decisions and informed numerous actions. Because, as the historian Inga Clendinnen explains, “Actions and words are conceived, expressed, recognized

¹³ Gary Van Valen, *Indigenous Agency in the Amazon: The Mojos in Liberal and Rubber-Boom Bolivia* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2013), 3.

and understood within a system of shared expectations and meanings,” one can infer from these actions the shared understanding that sustains them.¹⁴ For example, as the Narragansetts stood in defiance on the 14th of July in 2003, their collective action revealed not only a shared experience, but it also communicated how the Indians interpreted that experience. Indeed, the human wall formed by the Narragansetts, was a physical manifestation of collective frustrations. And the "tremendous applause" tendered to Wilcox as he admonished state policies evidenced the exasperation felt by many of his fellow tribal members. By employing the analytical framework described by Clendinnen, this work not only illuminates what the actions of people and groups connote about how the Narragansetts perceived different events, but it also encourages a greater appreciation for the unique worldview of these Indigenous peoples.

Through identifying, reappraising, and contextualizing the unique experiences of the Narragansetts, this work traces some of the cultural and ideological transformations within the tribal community. Although the Narragansetts are by no means a monolithic group, identifying general shifts in how the Natives conceptualized and expressed their indigeneity extends our understanding of the Indians. For example, in the short documentary “Sovereign Nation/Sovereign Neighbor” the Narragansett scholar Sylvia Spears maintains that the land settlement reached with Rhode Island’s leaders in 1978, “was not with the federally recognized tribe called the Narragansett [that is] two different things.”¹⁵ The “two different things” Spears was compartmentalizing was the political identity of the Narragansetts pre and post federal recognition. As mentioned earlier, the achievement of a federal status dramatically altered the

¹⁴ Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*, Second Edition (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003), 132.

¹⁵ Kendall Moore, “Sovereign Nation/Sovereign Neighbor,” Media that Matters, accessed June 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixvhuu24zoA>.

way the Indians conceptualized and expressed their relationships with local and state authorities. But these fluid ideas about the parameters of identity maintained and expressed by many Narragansetts were in juxtaposition to Rhode Island's rigid appraisals of indigeneity which had less to do with a political identity than a racial one. The scholar Craig N. Cipolla observes that the ideological and cultural transformations that occur in Indian communities "are neither wholly Native nor wholly European but mixed responses to the cultural and social pluralities of colonialism."¹⁶ Hence, identifying and appraising specific cultural and ideological changes within the Narragansett community helps to reveal not only how the Indians internalized their indigeneity in relation to the non-Indigenous others who also sought to define them, but it also illustrates how the Narragansetts continued to express their distinctiveness.

To reconstruct the social, political, and economic realities associated with certain historical events, this study consults many of the traditional sources produced by colonial and state officials. However, as described earlier, these documents are appraised using an "east facing" orientation, and thus, are employed to illuminate not only the world inhabited by the authors but also the realities experienced by the Narragansetts. This work supplements the sources produced by non-Indigenous peoples with the oral histories and personal recollections of some Narragansetts. Fisher and Silverman explain that oral traditions provide "an important Indigenous counterpoint" to a documentary record that is "woefully incomplete."¹⁷ Previous writers seldom consulted these alternative sources despite the fact that the oral histories of the Narragansetts are imbued with a distinct validity. First, the historical interpretations of the Narragansetts derive from an oral tradition that has remained unbroken for more than three

¹⁶ Craig N. Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 8.

¹⁷ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, x.

centuries.¹⁸ As the Indians gathered annually during—what is now known as the August Meeting—to celebrate their traditions, the stories, jokes, and histories they retold were passed on from one generation to the next creating and reinforcing an enduring perception of the past that often challenged traditional narratives. For example, Dawn Dove—a Narragansett scholar—stated that,

When I recall the oral histories that have been passed down in my family, and I read the historical documents of the colonizers I can readily see why the colonizers want to keep the lie. The truth would make one weep. The truth is so horrific that it would make one want to turn a blind eye rather than face the atrocities that were committed against our people.¹⁹

The oral histories that were passed down to Dove and other Narragansetts are not only credible because they were continually recalled and retold, but also because these acts of recollection were performed in familiar places steeped in the cultural geography of the Narragansetts.²⁰ The archeologist Patricia E. Rubertone explains that the forest, swamps, fields, and shorelines that the Narragansetts “traveled through settled on, and subsisted from...were places steeped in long-term histories, enduring social relations, and sacred traditions.”²¹ Moreover, the anthropologist Keith H. Basso argues that some Indian peoples viewed their landscapes “as a repository for

¹⁸ An article published in the *Providence Journal* in 2016 referenced the 341st meeting of the Narragansett in a gathering that has continued unbroken throughout its known existence. A key component of these meetings is the annual retelling of a tribe’s collective history.

¹⁹ Dawn Dove, “Introduction,” in *Dawn Land Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England*, ed. Siobhan Senier, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2014), 496.

²⁰ Although the ways in which geographers have conceptualized and employed the term “cultural geography” has gone through many revisions, here the term is used in accordance with the definition provided by The Department of Geography & Environment at The University of Texas at Austin to convey a unique “perception and sense of place” that “focus upon both the spatial attributes of culture and the interactions between culture and environment.” See: “Department of Geography & the Environment,” University of Texas, accessed June 28, 2017, <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/geography/undergraduate/Study-Tracks/Cultural.php>.

²¹ Patricia E. Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings: An Archaeology of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 103.

distilled wisdom, a stern but benevolent keeper of tradition.”²² Because the Narragansetts were never divorced from their most important historical landscapes, the Indians’ geographic repositories serve as constant reminders of not only wisdom and tradition, but also history.²³

More than three hundred and fifty years have passed since the Narragansetts suffered their greatest defeat at the hands of colonial authorities in what chroniclers have called “The Great Swamp Fight.” However, tribal members who—till this day—gather in commemoration at a landscape imbued with the cultural geography of the Indians, profess that the “fight” was no fight at all. Indeed, many Narragansetts refer to the event as “The Great Swamp Massacre” because—according to oral history—what took place in the winter of 1675 was the wholesale slaughter of noncombatants, elderly men, women, and children.

In October 2016, while standing at a location that for many Narragansetts has become hallowed ground, the tribal elder Dove-Jennings stated “I look around, I look at the leaves, I look at the color of the trees, I look at the shapes of the trees, and I wonder, I wonder what these trees’ ancestors saw happen here.”²⁴ It is clear that for Dove-Jennings and other Narragansetts this particular landscape serves as a repository that continues to inform perceptions about the realities experienced by tribal members both past and present. Devaluing the historical conceptualizations held by Dove, Dove-Jennings, and many other Narragansetts because they fail to conform to a more traditional evidentiary format, is to turn a blind eye to a rich alternative source of

²² Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscapes and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 63.

²³ The land upon which Indians continue to hold their annual August Meeting has never been in the possession of any other group dating back to before the arrival of the first Europeans.

²⁴ Tom Murphy, “Great Swamp Monument: Commemorating the Great Swamp Massacre of 1675,” Providence Journal, accessed June 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ignLtfcqQkg>.

information in a documentary record that remains woefully incomplete. And although like all sources, the oral histories of the Narragansetts must be employed judiciously, the continued failure to acknowledge and appraise these extremely viable pieces of evidence is untenable.

Another crucial source of information consulted throughout this work are the writings and documents produced by the Narragansetts themselves. Beginning in 1935 tribal members produced a monthly newsletter called “The Narragansett Dawn.” And although the paper’s final issue was produced in September of 1936, the histories, stories, recollections, and accounts it published during its short run depict a viewpoint that would otherwise remain mostly inaccessible. Heretofore, the *Dawn* has been used very sparingly by previous writers. By combining traditional documentary evidence with the alternative sources delineated above, not only is a Native viewpoint incorporated into the metanarrative, but a history gleaned from the actions, told through the voices, and written with the words of Indigenous peoples enriches our understanding of the past.

Chapter 1 - The Rock and the Sea

In a seminal work revealing the acts of accommodation that helped establish the “middle ground” as a place between cultures where interactions among diverse peoples led to the creation of new and shared meanings and practices, historian Richard White observed that the stories detailing relations between Euro-Americans and the area’s indigenous peoples have, on the whole, been overly simplistic. White explained that earlier narratives tended to interpret Indian peoples as rocks whose culture, lifeways, and identities were rigid and unchanging. In contrast, Europeans were often portrayed as the sea, a dynamic, persistent force that eventually “w[ore] down and dissolve[d] the rock.”²⁵

White’s rock and sea metaphors for chroniclers’ conceptualizations of early relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples give especially apt descriptions of scholars’ framing of cross-cultural interactions between the Narragansetts and Euro-Americans. Generally, writers have interpreted the Narragansetts as a people in the past, forever reduced to a pair of historical footnotes. First, the tribe has been remembered as the Natives who generously welcomed and aided Puritan outcast Roger Williams. The dissenter Williams not only founded the colony of Rhode Island but has also been credited with establishing greater religious freedom and tolerance in the region.²⁶ The Narragansetts provided a haven for him in his time of need, so the tribe has continued to hold a special—yet historical—place in regional and national lore. A

²⁵ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ix.

²⁶ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*. In the chapter “Eulogizing a Hero,” Rubertone traces how Roger Williams remained an obscure historical figure as late as 1831 but was later recast by historians such as George Bancroft and remembered as a principle architect of American liberalism.

small granite monument erected by the state of Rhode Island in tribute to the Narragansetts shed light on how non-Indians have continued to perceive the tribe. The words carved into the tablet explained that the stone was placed “in recognition of the kindness and hospitality of this once powerful nation to the founders of this State.” To those who commissioned and financed the memorial, it was clear that Rhode Islanders owe gratitude to the Indians, but it was also evident that, in the minds of many of these same citizens, the Indians to whom they owed appreciation were a people in the past.

Second, the Narragansetts have been remembered as the principal power in the Indigenous coalition that instigated a futile uprising against colonial authorities in 1675. In the prevailing narrative, the Narragansetts, in the aftermath of their defeat, “were no more by the summer of 1676.”²⁷ In this version of the past, over the span of a half-century, New England’s greatest rock—the Narragansetts—was utterly smashed and dissolved into the sea, making way for the expansion of Euro-American colonialists.

This paradigm proclaiming both the nobility and the disappearance of the Narragansetts is not unique to this tribe. Instead, these themes are representative of a general narrative interpreting Indigenous peoples as mostly inconsequential bit players in the Nation’s history. Scholar Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz explained that origin stories help define and unify a people’s collective identity and communicate their values. However, the author observed, the historical realities associated with colonialism have proven problematic for “those who seek history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation.”²⁸ Historian Susan A. Miller explained that “the prevailing narrative of American history originated with Columbus, and has

²⁷ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 48.

²⁸ Ibid.

never been favorable to the American Indigenous peoples.”²⁹ Moreover, the author posited, the “colonial posture of Europeans” engendered historical interpretations with strong anti-Indigenous biases. Dunbar-Ortiz argued that many earlier historians “hop[ed] to have successful careers in academia and to author lucrative school textbooks,” so they propagated and protected the historical myths later bemoaned by White, Miller, and many others.

Early scholars generally embraced and rationalized the themes associated with what has become known as “settler colonialism”—the replacement of Indigenous populations through state-based policies of genocide and land theft. The narratives that mythologized Euro-Americans as a vibrant sea smashing the supposedly inert, intransigent rock of Native societies with the unrelenting waves of modernity and civilization, therefore, can be understood as explanations and rationalizations of a turbulent past. The assumptions and implication associated with these earlier narratives have proven to be enduring and—as Miller observed—“continue to poison the Euroamerican discourse of American Indian history.”³⁰

The first scholarly chronicles focused on Native Americans appeared in the mid-1800s. The writers of these accounts sought to explain and legitimize the general withdrawal of Indigenous peoples as the United States expanded its western boundaries. “The field from its earliest manifestations,” wrote Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup, “made its name by studying materials devoted to justifying European settlement in the Americas.”³¹ Many early accounts cast Native Americans as undeserving “savages” ill equipped

²⁹ Susan A. Miller, “Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 1 (2009): 25–45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587764>.

³⁰ Susan Miller, “Native Historians Write Back,” 25.

³¹ Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup, “Materials and Methods in Native American and Indigenous Studies: Completing the Turn,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2018): 217, accessed June 28th 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.75.2.0207>.

to realize the potential of the land they held. From this perspective, the dispossession and removal of Indian peoples was interpreted as a sign of the nation's "manifest destiny" to—as explained by John O'Sullivan, who coined the term—"overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."³² To realize this future envisioned by O'Sullivan and many others, the original inhabitants of the "continent allotted by Providence" had to vanish or at least retreat to the periphery, relinquishing their land for "free development" by the "multiplying millions."

The desire for the continent's Indigenous inhabitants to cede their land was depicted in *American Progress*, an 1872 painting by John Gast many consider to be the graphic embodiment of O'Sullivan's vision. In the painting, Indigenous persons, half-naked and clutching instruments of war, creep to the margins as Columbia, a white-clothed, white-skinned woman representing America, leads a procession of white faces marching west to bring progress and prosperity to a land previously filled with wild animals and wild people.

Accounts published in the mid-to-late nineteenth century on tribes east of the Mississippi also foreshadowed the next dominant trope in Indigenous history. Chroniclers of tribes along the Atlantic coast often portrayed Indigenous communities as "brave, populous, powerful, generous, and hospitable."³³ However, the Indians, according to these same writers, were also vanquished and on the path to extinction. As Jeffery P. Shepherd wrote, Native Americans were deemed to be "doomed relics of the past . . . noble savages . . . on their last vision quest."³⁴ After the

³² Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), xi.

³³ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 48.

³⁴ Jeffery P. Shepherd, "From Savages to Sovereigns: A General Historiography of American Indian History," University of Texas at El Paso, accessed July 19, 2018, <https://faculty.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=historiogexample.doc&tabid=44717&mid=135578>.

massacre of the Lakota at Wounded Knee in 1890, a motif depicting Indigenous persons as “noble savages” dominated the historical discourse, even west of the Mississippi. The belief that Native American culture was both laudable and ephemeral gave rise to what became known as “salvage anthropology.” To preserve the material authenticity of Native American culture, anthropologists such as Franz Boas recorded many customs and traditions of the various dwindling tribes.

In Rhode Island, this renewed interest in salvaging, documenting, and preserving the “traditional” lifeways of Indigenous peoples most notoriously manifested in the desecration and plunder of Indian gravesites. The unearthing of one grave—said to be the “Tut-ank-ahmen of Rhode Island”—yielded a treasure-trove of “relics,” some of which ended up in collections maintained by the Rhode Island Historical Society and Harvard University’s Peabody Museum.³⁵ Even as Rhode Islanders grew more curious about the ways in which the Indians used to live, however, they continued to mostly ignore the descendants of those whose graves they raided. In fact, the state never prosecuted a suit filed by Narragansett tribal members Henry Hazard, John Noka, and Gideon Ammons accusing nine men of illegally unearthing Rhode Island’s “Tut-ank-ahmen.”³⁶ Moreover, the cultural snapshots looters pulled from the earth proved delimiting. As antiquarians paraded and displayed their ill-gotten treasures as authentic representations of Indigeneity, they hardened perceptions and misconceptions, leaving little room for contemporary Indians who did not live precisely as their ancestors had two hundred years earlier.

The exploitation of Native peoples became a central focus of writers whose accounts appeared in the mid-twentieth century. Influenced by the societal reordering of the progressive

³⁵ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

era and the social upheavals of the civil rights movement, revisionist historians turned from interpreting Indian peoples as “noble savages” and lamenting their supposed disappearance to decrying the cruelties suffered by Indigenous communities, constituting what became known as the “Indian as victim” school of historiography.³⁷ Historians such as Angie Debo, Alvin Josephy, and Donald Berthrong documented specific abuses as settlers, politicians, missionaries, and even officials at the Bureau of Indian Affairs exploited Natives and their land and natural resources.³⁸ For example, Debo’s *And Still the Waters Run* “quickly became a classic of Indian history” as the author “uncovered the sordid truth of greed that Oklahomans had denied with myths of progress and patriotism.”³⁹

Nowhere were the myths of Euro-American benevolence and Indian disappearance more enduring than in New England, where the descendants and apologists of the Puritans crafted durable historical narratives proclaiming the magnanimity of the settlers. However, the mythos declaring the evenhandedness of New England’s early colonists encountered a significant challenge in 1976 with the publication of Francis Jennings’ *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*. Jennings debunked traditional constructions of cross-cultural relations as Puritan propaganda and depicted Euro-Americans as purposeful, conscious imperialists. “The conquerors of America glorified the devastation they wrought in visions of righteousness,” wrote Jennings, “and their descendants have been reluctant to peer through the aura.”⁴⁰ Like Debo, Jennings methodically recounted certain injustices experienced by Native

³⁷ Shepherd, “From Savages to Sovereigns.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6.

peoples and denounced the colonists as “liars who dissembled to justify conquest.”⁴¹ More than an indictment of Euro-American settlers, though, *The Invasion of America* constituted a novel approach to the study of American history. “American society is the product not only of interaction between colonists and natives,” posited Jennings, “but of contributions from both.”⁴² The author argued that Indigenous peoples were not “mere foil[s]” or curiosities but central figures whose decisions and actions helped shape current realities. However, *The Invasion of America* was disjointed because Jennings failed to thoroughly incorporate in the second half of the book the methodological changes advocated in the first half. For example, as Jennings delineated the abuses committed by the colonists, he limited his depiction of Indigenous persons, including the Narragansetts, to that of victims. Jennings, Debo, and others with similar views portrayed Natives as simple and ineffectual. These Indians did not participate in the creation of historical outcomes because history happened to them, not because of them. Simply put, they were victims and victims only.

Jennings admitted that due to the scope, his book offered “more than the ordinary number of opportunities for error.”⁴³ However, the shortcomings of its second half appear more egregious when one considers that *The Invasion of America* was published after Vine Deloria’s *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* which first appeared in 1969. Deloria (Sioux) railed against the simplistic, superficial depictions of Indians perpetuated by scholars who adhered to the popular tropes of savagery and victimization. “The American public,” observed

⁴¹ Kirsten Fischer, “In Retrospect: The Career of Francis Jennings,” *Reviews in American History* 30, no. 4 (2002): 519, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

⁴² Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, vi–vii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, viii.

Deloria, “fe[It] most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land.”⁴⁴ The author aimed to make the “American public” uncomfortable through his cutting prose and unabashed exhibition of the misuses, misunderstandings, and missteps of Euro-Americans. *Custer Died for Your Sins* initiated a paradigm shift in studies on Native American history because the author not only condemned the dominant society—as the writers of the victimization school had—but also delineated specific acts of resistance, stressing the agency of Indigenous peoples. For example, Deloria wrote:

Always, it seemed, the white man chose a course of action that did not work. The white man preached that it was good to help the poor, yet he did nothing to assist the poor in his own society. Instead he put constant pressure on the Indian people to hoard their worldly goods, and when they failed to accumulate capital but freely gave to the poor, the white man reacted violently.⁴⁵

This passage reveals not only the folly and viciousness exhibited by some Euro-Americans but also the Indigenous peoples’ refusal to completely give up their lifeways in favor of the supposed superiority and civility of white society. Despite Deloria’s demand for a broader interpretation of Native peoples, though, the master narrative continued to proclaim that the Indians who failed to assimilate and melt into the American collective were inauthentic—especially if they did not exhibit the mythical stereotypes Deloria exposed and condemned.

Only a few years before Deloria’s scathing condemnation, historian Robert Berkhofer issued a challenge to academics in the article “The Political Context of a New Indian History.” Berkhofer explained that “assumptions about racial superiority” often informed interpretations of the “history of white–Indian relations.”⁴⁶ He called on scholars to reevaluate their

⁴⁴ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ Robert F. Berkhofer, “The Political Context of a New Indian History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (1971): 357–8.

conceptualizations of Native American history and to shift from simplistic, one-sided narratives dominated by the Euro-American experience to more inclusive interpretations taking into account the persistence of Indigenous communities. “By concentrating on this latter theme,” wrote Berkhofer, “the historian moves Indian actors to the center of the stage and makes Indian-Indian relations as important as white-Indian ones have been previously.” Essentially, in this article, Berkhofer outlined the need for scholars to address what was an interpretive gap in not only studies on Native Americans but also the overall historical discourse because the persistence of Indigenous communities remained a central theme in American history.

Moreover, like Deloria, Berkhofer sought to challenge the enduring fallacies of the incivility, savagery, and disappearance of Indigenous peoples. In *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, Berkhofer observed that the idea and image of Indians, at their core, were a “White conception. ...The *Indian* was a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype.”⁴⁷ The author explained that Euro-Americans created standardized interpretations that often misconstrued and conflated Indigenous cultures. Berkhofer showed that colonial and American authorities used the images and stereotypes attached to this homogenized version of Indigeneity to justify dispossession. Within this context, the Indians who inevitably failed to conform to the stereotyped imagery crafted by non-Indians were interpreted as inauthentic, so their claims as Indigenous persons were deemed to be immaterial. *The White Man's Indian* has remained an important piece of the historiographical puzzle for not only tracing the genesis and uses of imagery and stereotypes derided by many subsequent scholars but also issuing Berkhofer's challenge for academics to

⁴⁷ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1979), 3.

envision Native peoples as historical actors. In *The White Man's Indian*, the author provided writers with a model of how to do so.

By the early 1980s, many scholars, influenced by the social upheavals of the 1960s, fully embraced Berkhofer's call to action and produced works reinterpreting Indigenous peoples as active agents central to the creation of historical change. Historians such as James Merrill, Richard White, Neal Salisbury, Colin Calloway, and Jean M. O'Brien, among others, generated accounts reimagining the historical roles played by Native Americans. For example, in *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and The Making of New England, 1500–1643*, Neal Salisbury departed from many earlier simplistic, deterministic accounts and showed that Natives shaped colonial policies, “forced non-Indians to follow their rationales for trade, controlled the regional economy, and briefly fended off Anglo expansion.”⁴⁸ Salisbury's work has been widely hailed as an early example of the merits of ethnohistory—a methodology blending anthropology, linguistic studies, archeology, and history in an effort to go beyond the written record to reconstruct historical realities. Drawing on a wide variety of source material, Salisbury devoted equal attention to the experiences of Natives and colonists as both peoples worked to craft, reform, and reinterpret cross-cultural experiences. The book's opening chapter reconstructed life along the eastern coast of the northern Atlantic before European settlement. In doing so, Salisbury illuminated many continuities between the worlds inhabited by Indigenous peoples before and after contact with Europeans. *Manitou and Providence* has remained instructive because it showed how to overcome the limitations of traditional documentary evidence when creating narratives highlighting communities that left few written records.

⁴⁸ Shepherd, “From Savages to Sovereigns,” 10.

In *Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*, Richard White employed this same methodology to describe the processes that wrought particular yet often shared historical outcomes among various Native peoples. In his investigation of the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos, White drew upon the work of archeologists and anthropologists to delineate series of political, economic, and environmental changes that eroded the autonomy of these Indigenous communities, making them (and many others) dependent peoples. White posited that for the Choctaws—and, by extension, other Indian peoples—“trade and market meant not wealth but impoverishment, not well-being but dependency, and not progress but exile and dispossession.”⁴⁹

The Roots of Dependency was more nuanced than many previous accounts simply chronicling the victimization of Indians. In the work, White illustrated how the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos adapted their lifeways to better meet their evolving social, cultural, and environmental realities. For example, he showed that throughout much of the eighteenth century, the Choctaws were able to pit the English and the French against each other, collecting “gifts” from both European powers. However, after the English victory in what is commonly referred to as the French and Indian War and the expulsion of France from North America in 1763, the Choctaws could no longer play both sides and became subject to the demands of the market economy. White argued that to acquire the European products upon which they had grown accustomed, the Choctaw decimated a significant source of their subsistence—the whitetail deer. In this way, White traced how Native peoples actively participated in the creation of their lived

⁴⁹ Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 146.

experiences. The methodological approach pioneered by Salisbury and White was widely adopted by many of their successors.

White's investigative model was taken up and applied to great effect by David Rich Lewis in *Neither Wolf nor Dog: American Indians, Environment and Agrarian Change*. Lewis not only followed White's interdisciplinary approach but also incorporated the same comparative model developed in *The Roots of Dependency*. Like White, Lewis used three Indigenous tribes—the Northern Utes, Hupas, and Tohono O'odhams—as case studies to trace “Native American responses to directed cultural change, particularly the social and environmental consequences of directed subsistence change.”⁵⁰ Lewis observed that the policies of directed subsistence pursued by the Euro-American majority mostly failed because they were ill conceived, and more importantly, Indians proved to not simply be white men of a darker shade. For example, many Ute men refused to adopt the majority's agrarian practices due to the traditional view of farming as women's work. Lewis argued that these Indigenous communities investigated were neither wolf (wholly unassimilated) nor dog (completely acculturated), so they were seen by many as innately deficient and consequently relegated to the social and economic margins. *Neither Wolf nor Dog* told “part of the larger story of how agrarian-based policies, environmental change, and native cultural responses contributed to the ultimate dependency of previously self-sufficient peoples.”⁵¹ However, instead of focusing on what Indian peoples lost while attempting to adopt Euro-American lifeways, Lewis illustrated the evolutions and transformations occurring within these Indigenous communities. Hence, Lewis interpreted the Natives not as passive victims of externally imposed changes but as protagonists who actively wrought their own realities.

⁵⁰ David Rich Lewis, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵¹ Lewis, *Neither Wolf nor Dog*, 17.

This interpretive shift was indicative of what became known as “new Indian history,” borrowing the term from Berkhofer’s instructive, path-breaking article. Perhaps the most notable work produced within this new methodological and interpretive approach was White’s *The Middle Ground*. When it appeared in 1991, *The Middle Ground* was nothing less than an ideological revolution because White did not describe Indians as victims or bit players eking out an existence on the periphery. Instead, White argued, Native peoples were crucial to forging a middle ground established by accommodation and dominated by neither Euro-Americans nor Indians. White explained that “this accommodation took place because for long periods of time in large parts of the colonial world whites could neither dictate to Indians nor ignore them. Whites needed Indians as allies, as partners in exchange, as sexual partners, as friendly neighbors.”⁵² For White, this middle ground was not merely a forum for accommodation and compromise but an entirely new cultural creation formed in a dialectical process. He explained:

On the middle ground diverse peoples adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings. People try to persuade others who are different from themselves by appealing to what they perceive to be the values and the practices of those others. They often misinterpret and distort both the values and practices of those they deal with, but from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices—the shared meanings and practices of the middle ground.⁵³

White’s interpretation of the interactions between Indigenous peoples and Euro-Americans in the context of a middle ground necessarily placed the former at the center of his investigations and firmly grounded his work in the model of new Indian history. However, the author did more than reinterpret Native peoples as agents and active protagonists because upon this middle ground, new yet authentic Indigenous identities were formed.

⁵² White, *The Middle Ground*, X.

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

White inspired many historians to reappraise how they interpreted interactions between Natives and non-Natives, resulting in more academics discovering, defining, exploring, and contextualizing the middle grounds between various Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. For example, in his work on the Indian slave trade, Alan Galloway posited that “neither Louisiana nor Florida nor Carolina could have resisted the powerful Indian confederacies,” and “at any time, native peoples could have destroyed the plantations and entire colonies.”⁵⁴ Galloway explained that the Europeans who settled in these regions were dependent on the Indians and could not have survived without their assistance. The power dynamics outlined by Galloway meant that Euro-Americans were unable to dictate the terms of cross-cultural interaction and exchange.

Following the examples of Salisbury, Lewis, and White, Galloway began *The Indian Slave Trade* by outlining the social, political, and demographic realities experienced before the arrival of Europeans by what scholars now refer to as the Mississippian Cultures—possibly the most complex Indigenous community in the Americas north of Mexico. In reconstructing the lifeways of the Mississippian people, Galloway “assessed evidence within new contexts and from different perspectives.”⁵⁵ In *The Indian Slave Trade*, he also relied heavily on the abundance of archeological evidence uncovered from the earthen mounds—some reaching as high as one hundred feet—built and used by the Indians for more than two thousand years.⁵⁶ Galloway showed that the Mississippian peoples kept slaves as labor sources and status symbols long before the arrival of Euro-Americans, and “Europeans did not introduce slavery or the notion of slaves as laborers to the American South but instead were responsible for stimulating a vast trade in

⁵⁴ Allen Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵⁶ Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 43.

humans as commodities.”⁵⁷ This trade served as the foundation upon which Natives and Euro-Americans negotiated a middle ground. Both cultures made social, political, and economic adjustments to better accommodate an exchange that proved to be “the most important factor affecting the South” from 1670–1715.⁵⁸ More than a chronicle of the interactions between Natives and non-Natives, *The Indian Slave Trade* placed Indians at the center of the narrative by focusing on the interactions, relationships, alliances, and rivalries among various Indigenous communities. For example, Gallay observed that for the polities comprising the Creek, the “Confederation met their needs, and did so in a manner that neither eradicated nor significantly altered the individuals’ and groups’ traditional ways of life, social systems, and local polities.”⁵⁹

Ultimately, the Indigenous communities discussed by Gallay were not—as assumed by many earlier chroniclers—hamstrung by antiquated traditions that rendered them incapable of adjusting to new social, economic, and political realities. Instead—and according with the themes explored by the school of new Indian history—the Natives profiled in *The Indian Slave Trade* were dynamic, active arbiters of not only their own experiences but also those of the people with whom they interacted. For example, Gallay explained that the Yamasee War—a conflict that erupted in 1714 when the trade alliance between the Yamasee and Carolinian settlers broke down—forever changed life in South Carolina. “It took years for South Carolina to rebuild after the Yamasee War,” wrote Gallay, “but by 1730 it had emerged in a dramatically new form.”⁶⁰ Gallay explained that only in the aftermath of the conflict with the Yamasse did South Carolina planters begin to import African slaves in high numbers. The turn from unfree

⁵⁷ Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

Indian labor to unfree African labor forever reshaped demographics in the region. In fact, over the next century, South Carolinians imported so many Africans that by 1860, black slaves comprised fifty-seven percent of the state's population.⁶¹ These shifts in the racial makeup of South Carolina were spurred by Native Americans and revealed the utility and value of not only Gallay's work but also the school of new Indian history. *The Indian Slave Trade* confirmed the centrality of Indigenous peoples in the creation of the social, political, and economic conditions that came to dominate the American South. Due to such reappraisals, the experiences and contributions of Native Americans were no longer deemed supplemental but were seen as essential to the development of larger historical realities.

In many ways, Pekka Hamalainen's *The Comanche Empire* embodied recent attempts to reframe historical narratives about America's Indigenous population. Hamalainen challenged traditional notions of empire and power and, in doing so, found not only a middle ground but also a world dominated by the Comanche, which had significant ramifications for interpretations of broader American history. The author described a past when "Indians expand[ed], dictate[d], and prosper[ed], and European colonists resist[ed], retreat[ed], and struggle[d] to survive."⁶² Moreover, *The Comanche Empire* moved beyond the traditional interpretive confines of the colonial era and showed how these "Lords of the South Plains" were able to repel Euro-American excursions into the Southwest throughout much of the nineteenth century. More than defenders of their land and lifeways, the Comanche—as profiled by Hamalainen—were imperialists in their own right as "they manipulated and exploited the colonial outposts in New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and northern Mexico."⁶³ The author convincingly argued for the

⁶¹ "Census of 1860," accessed July 28, 2018, http://www.civil-war.net/pages/1860_census.html.

⁶² Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

centrality of Indigenous persons when he observed that “the rise of the Comanche empire helps to explain why Mexico’s Far North is today the American Southwest.”⁶⁴

Hamalainen acknowledged that *The Comanche Empire* was about a past that “according to conventional histories, did not exist.” He revealed the contours of this world by reexamining how power was exerted. Instead of framing dominion solely in terms of possession and colonization, he also took assimilation, spatial and economic control, and influence over neighbors as evidence of power and authority. For example, Hamalainen described a peace treaty fashioned in 1752 between the Spanish governor of New Mexico and Comanche chiefs as “highly favorable for the latter.”⁶⁵ The author explained that through bellicosity and vigorous diplomacy, the Comanche crafted a social, political, and economic reality in which Spanish officials adjusted their practices to better accommodate “Comanche principles.”⁶⁶ In addition to telling the story of the power dynamics between Euro-Americans and Indians, Hamalainen made plain the significance of intertribal alliances and rivalries. For instance, he explained that at the same time the Comanches made peace with New Mexico, tribal leaders also secured their eastern and northern borders through alliances with the Taovayas and the Pawnee. According to Hamalainen, the détente allowed the Comanche chiefs to target their aggression at the Osage nation.⁶⁷ By focusing on the diplomacy and strategic maneuverings of Native peoples, Hamalainen revealed a Southwest that was, in many ways, an Indigenous creation. Similarly, by illuminating the actions and decisions of certain Indian leaders, this study shows that—until 1676—southern New England was primarily a world shaped and defined by Indigenous peoples.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 48–9.

Despite the broad, encompassing reappraisals of the Native experience produced by scholars such as Galloway and Hamalainen, the history of the American Indian remained—for some academics—a subfield with limited relevancy to the development of larger historical truths.⁶⁸ Frederick Hoxie posited that many historians continued to conceptualize the history of North America as an inevitable march toward the development of the American nation-state. From this perspective, the United States appeared to result from a general progression toward modernity.⁶⁹ “The Indian role in this story,” explained Hoxie, was “to resist, adapt, negotiate, endure and persist.”⁷⁰ Despite Indigenous peoples’ efforts to accommodate and persevere, the deterministic framework of this national development model interpreted Indigenous peoples as ancillary to the creation of contemporary American realities. Consequently, some modern scholars continued to view Indian history as interesting but, in Hoxie’s words, “well ... not very important.”⁷¹

Recently, Hoxie and other like-minded academics employed an interpretive framework focused on “settler colonialism” as a new lens through which to view historical developments in North America. These scholars argued that for Euro-Americans, continental expansion and self-definition were simultaneous processes. Although settlers initially sought to surround and displace Indigenous populations, these diverse peoples created new, overlapping social, political, cultural, and economic institutions over time. Distinctions certainly remained, but Natives and settlers’ experiences were not as strictly isolated as suggested by the categories of nation and culture. Building on the work of Paul Gilroy, who proposed the concept of the “Black Atlantic”—an interpretive approach positing that the experiences of African peoples during the

⁶⁸ Frederick E. Hoxie, “Retrieving the Red Continent: Settler Colonialism and the History of American Indians in the US.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 6 (2008): 1154.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.,

colonial era were broader and more complex than allowed by the traditional frameworks of race and nation—Hoxie argued for a reconceptualization of what he termed the “Red Continent.” Instead of conceiving the history of North America in terms of national development, historians could interpret the region as a Red Continent to “imagine a new landscape in which the complex and continuously-evolving relationship between invaders, their national projects, and displaced indigenous peoples was played out.”⁷² Hoxie’s Red Continent placed Indigenous people at the forefront of national narratives as Natives and settlers mediated historical realities through ongoing acts of contestation, adaptation, and accommodation. Within this context, Indigenous peoples did not merely resist and persist—as proclaimed by traditional accounts written in the mode of national development—but they also crafted and created.

Moreover, Hoxie explained, the framework of settler colonialism and the recognition of a Red Continent shed light on connections among aspects of Indigenous life overlooked as unimportant or inconsequential.⁷³ For example, a family oral history collected in research for this study told of an event at an annual meeting of the Narragansett tribe during the mid-to-late 1940s. Former tribal councilwoman Wanda Hopkins recalled a story her mother Evangeline Hankinson told. According to Hopkins, her grandfather Thomas Babcock, whom she had never met, explained to his young daughter Evangeline why she and the rest of her family were not allowed to participate in the ritual dances others performed at the annual meetings. “Look at all the niggers pretending to be Indian,” Babcock reproved.

His statement might first seem immaterial when viewed through an interpretive lens of struggle and adjustment, but it revealed larger truths about the changes and divisions taking place

⁷² Ibid., 1161.

⁷³ Ibid., 1160.

within the greater Narragansett community. Beginning in the 1920s, as argued later in this work, the annual August meeting of Narragansett families underwent dramatic changes when some tribal members appropriated aspects of western Indigenous cultures and made a spectacle of these adopted characteristics at the gatherings. The transformation had implications beyond aesthetic preferences because it coincided with a national shift in portrayals of Indian peoples in popular culture. Hence, the war bonnets and fancy flowing regalia donned by dancers declared their authenticity as Indigenous peoples and could be understood as part of an ongoing contest framed by the realities of settler colonialism. Not all tribal members, though, approved of the changes, as made clear in Babcock's statement.

However, recently some historians questioned how much agency and influence Indians could have exerted when the middle ground ultimately devolved into the widespread dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous peoples. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz has argued that narratives depicting the colonial experience as an "encounter" and "dialogue" between cultures were, in reality, justifications, rationalizations, and "apologies for one-sided robbery and murder."⁷⁴ In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Dunbar-Ortiz declared that "the history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism," but she interpreted the conditions wrought under settler colonialism differently than Hoxie. Instead of identifying areas of accommodation and creation, Dunbar-Ortiz defined settler colonialism as "the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery and a policy of genocide and land theft."⁷⁵ Within this context, claims of accommodation and

⁷⁴ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

collaboration became “an insidious smoke screen meant to obscure the fact that the very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an entire continent and its resources.”⁷⁶

Citing Jean O’Brien, Dunbar-Ortiz observed that the settler class sought to redefine North America as a blank canvas devoid of any historical significance before Euro-American acts of firsting. “All over the continent,” wrote Dunbar-Ortiz, “local histories, monuments, and signage narrate the story of first settlement ... the first school, first dwelling, first everything, as if there had never been occupants who thrived in those places before Euro-Americans.”⁷⁷ The author explained that the national narrative, in contrast, depicted the continent’s Native inhabitants as “last Indians or last tribes,” thereby replacing and erasing Indigenous peoples. Dunbar-Ortiz contended this was the real history of settler colonialism and the United States.

Despite Dunbar-Ortiz’s too heavy-handed dismissal of the commonalities present in aspects of the Euro-American and Native experiences, her point about attributing too much authority and agency to Indigenous persons was well made and proved insightful. As discussed in detail in chapter four, the Narragansetts’ efforts to publicly reassert their identity as an Indigenous community in the years after detribalization were generally disregarded until Ellison Brown’s athletic accomplishments made the Indians impossible to ignore.⁷⁸ Given the universality and persistence of the challenges faced by many Indian communities—both past and present—it is not difficult to imagine that more than bad choices and the breakdown of the middle grounds influenced the development of economic, social, and political conditions throughout North America. But, as Bonnie Lynn-Sherow observed, “Few historians have deeply

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁸ This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

considered the ways in which historical tensions between social groups, not just culture itself,” has helped to shape actual outcomes.⁷⁹

In *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory*, Lynn-Sherow examined the conditions that led to the ecological and social transformation of the Oklahoma Territory between the “public” land runs of 1889 and statehood in 1907. The advance of white settlers into the Oklahoma Territory has often been interpreted as an example of the promise of western migration—the idea that when combined with hard work and perseverance, the opportunities afforded those who migrated west portended economic success and independence. But, as Lynn-Sherow explains, what is often remembered is “a ‘winner’s’ history told by the people who remain.”⁸⁰ Through her appraisals of the experiences of Euro-American settlers, African American migrants, and Indigenous Kiowas, Lynn-Sherow debunks the myths associated with migration into the Oklahoma Territory and in its place offers a more complex and complete, albeit less cheerful, accounting of the period. *Red Earth* frames early attempts to partition and settle the Oklahoma Territory as a protracted struggle in which “one people’s relationship to the red earth came to dominate the landscape, banishing all others to the far edges of historical memory.”⁸¹ The author shows that the “race to see who would determine the fate of the territory” was never a fair contest because economic, social, cultural, political, and ecological success in the region was not determined primarily by opportunity, hard work, and perseverance, but by race. For instance, Lynn-Sherow explains that African American farmers were often forced to

⁷⁹ Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 145.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

settle on smaller and less productive plots than that of their Euro-American neighbors.⁸²

Moreover, these same neighbors often excluded African Americans and Native Americans from their costs-sharing collectives and prohibited black and Indian farmers from access to new scientific innovations emanating from the agricultural experiment station in Stillwater.⁸³

Still, the African Americans and Kiowas described by Lynn-Sherow were not simply hapless victims of white avarice but active agents who helped to determine their own realities. For example, the author contends that because they settled on smaller plots, African Americans overplanted their lands and depleted the soil rendering many of their farms not only unprofitable but also unsustainable.⁸⁴ Conversely, some Kiowas—who had a tradition of farming their lands collectively—chose to sublease the plots allotted to them by way of the Dawes Act instead of becoming lone agriculturalists. But in doing so, the Indians not only reaped modest rents and none of the fruits of the harvest, but they also made way for their own dispossession as their former tenants employed a legal system rife with racial bias to turn the Indians' lands into their own. It was in such ways that African Americans and Native Americans participated in creating the circumstances that would lead to both the ascendancy of Euro-Americans and their own marginalization in the Oklahoma Territory.⁸⁵

However, Lynn-Sherow is careful not to overstate the efficacy of African American and Native American acts of agency. The author's central argument is that in the effort to determine the ecological, agricultural, and economic outcomes in the Oklahoma Territory, Euro-Americans used racial discrimination to create and maintain an unfair advantage. "Power regulated the

⁸² Ibid., 34-35

⁸³ Ibid., 143.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 140.

discourse of different peoples,” Lynn-Sherow explained, “and thus shaped inevitable intersections of culture and ecology.”⁸⁶ It is this recognition and communication of the existence, persistence, and limitations of the agency of both Native Americans and African Americans that has proved most instructive to my own study. Throughout this work, discussions about the pervasiveness and consequences of Indigenous agency—after the period of initial contact—are framed within the limits of minority groups with little control over the levers of power or what Lynn-Sherow described as “negotiated responses.” Indeed, if the Natives could have, they probably would have sought different outcomes. And although the ascendance of the settler class was not predetermined, *Red Earth* shows that the economic and political supremacy of Euro-Americans—which has remained a historical reality throughout North America—was often buttressed by racism. It was not that minority groups lacked the capacity to create and adapt to new social, political, economic, and even ecological realities, it was that they were seldom given an equal opportunity in which to do so.

The authors profiled in this brief historiography influenced the methodological, interpretive, and organizational approach of this work. Therefore the account that follows is an ethnographic history incorporating a variety of source material (written records, oral histories, and archeological studies and assessments) to trace the continuities and evolutions of the Narragansett community. Following the models established by proponents of new Indian history, this work not only focuses on Indigenous persons as central characters but also illuminates and explains how Natives actively shaped political and social realities throughout southern New England. Moreover, it is argued that the conditions and consequences of contemporary cross-

⁸⁶ Ibid., 3.

cultural interactions cannot be understood without appreciation of the historical circumstances that helped inform modern conceptualizations.

In the traditional narrative, one that—as we have seen—remains extremely influential, the Narragansetts no longer exist. According to this version of the past, this once powerful tribe was defeated in a regrettable but honorable conflict that paved the way for the Puritan dominance of New England and the ascendancy of non-Indians in North America. Hence, those persons who continue to purport a Narragansett identity are really imposters who hold but a smidgen—if any—of Narragansett blood. Within this framework, these usurpers and pretenders are viewed as wholly undeserving of any of the special privileges, considerations, or redresses afforded Indigenous persons. This enduring paradigm not only informs the perpetual opposition of Rhode Island state officials to assertions of Narragansett tribal authority, but it also explains the dearth of the historical investigation focusing on the tribe following the end of King Phillip's War in 1676.⁸⁷ "Most European Americans were convinced that the Narragansetts had vanished," writes Rubertone while challenging longstanding misconceptions, "Moreover, those who still called themselves Narragansett carried the stigma of mixed ancestry."⁸⁸ Because many chroniclers believed erroneously that the Narragansetts perished in the aftermath of the war, few have devoted much attention to those remnants continuing to claim the tribe's perseverance. Alice Collins Gleeson's *Colonial Rhode Island* was indicative of this interpretative approach. The author wrote that "after this defeat [King Philip's War], the Rhode Island Indians had no independent life...their strength had gone, and they passed away."⁸⁹ But, the narrative

⁸⁷ Although the war dragged on in other locations, in Rhode Island—and for the vast majority of the Narragansett—the war was over in 1676.

⁸⁸ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 61.

⁸⁹ Alice Collins Gleeson papers (Alice Collins) papers, MS.1U.G4, John Hay Library Special Collections

championed by Gleeson and many others in the region was a fallacy undergirded by historical misconceptions, inaccurate or incomplete records, and—at times—nefarious agendas.

Greater interest in the experiences of the Narragansetts beyond the seventeenth century coincided with a more general national awakening towards the plights of America's ethnic minorities. The rhetoric of "rights" and "entitlement" inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society permeated national discourse throughout the 1960s and 1970s and was reflected in historical scholarship. Spurred by the utility of this new language, individuals from traditionally marginalized groups worked not only to challenge delimiting stereotypes and publically redefine their ethnic and racial identities, but also to demand redress for the historical injustices suffered by their ancestors. "American Indians indeed were able to navigate the changing currents of American ethnic politics," writes the scholar Joane Nagel, "and their success resulted in increased federal spending on Indian affairs."⁹⁰ Nagel ascribes the rise of Red Power—greater militancy among Native Americans—to "this atmosphere of increased resources, ethnic grievances, ethnic pride, and civil rights activism."⁹¹ The Narragansetts were very much involved in the crusading associated with the Red Power movement. In fact, tribal members were present during the siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1973. The agency of Native Americans not only elevated the public profile of Indigenous peoples, but it also inspired reassessments of historic—and now seemingly antiquated—interpretations of the Native American experience.

⁹⁰ Joane Nage, "American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Politics and the Resurgence of Identity," in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie et al. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 340-341.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 341.

It was in this atmosphere of reappraisal that Ethel Boissevain's *The Narragansett People* was published in 1975. The works produced by the anthropologist constitute the first study of any kind that focused on the experiences of the Narragansetts beyond the seventeenth century. The author undertook a novel approach in her investigation as she supplemented the limited documentary record maintained by the state with the registers preserved by tribal members. In fact, Boissevain's use and publication of information contained in tribal documents that were heretofore unknown outside of the Narragansett community significantly contributed to a general understanding of the social, political, and economic realities experienced by the Narragansetts throughout the nineteenth century. Boissevain primarily focuses on the conditions leading up to the detribalization of the Narragansetts in 1880, and it is in this area that her work proves instructive. However, the techniques—namely, a more in-depth analysis of the meanings and perceptions connoted through agency—later applied by scholars to the investigation of Indigenous peoples was not yet in common practice at the time Boissevain was writing. And as such, the author failed to more thoroughly identify and describe the historical exigencies and contingencies that informed particular decisions and actions during crucial moments in tribal history.

Despite Boissevain's important revelations and the continued advocacy of tribal members, it would take fourteen years before another book that focused primarily on the collective experience of the Narragansetts was produced. *The Narragansett* written by William S. Simmions for the Indians of North America series was published in 1989. Simmions' greatest contribution is in his synthetization because the book admirably appraised differing aspects of the Narragansett experience. The author traces the history of the Narragansetts from before the first contact with Europeans to the aftermath of the tribe's recognition by the federal government

in 1983. And as a survey, *The Narragansett* is a commendable work. Simmions even included such interesting aspects of Narragansett culture as traditional recipes, images and explanations of beadwork and weaving techniques, and a few examples and translations of the Algonquin language.

However, Simmions failed to supplement traditional documentary sources with those produced and maintained by the Narragansetts as Boissevain had done. As a result, Simmons rarely challenges the assertions made by state and local authorities nor questions their intent. For example, while discussing Rhode Island's effort to detribalize the Narragansetts, a process that the author admitted was most likely illegal, Simmons claimed that state officials "probably, unknowingly" violated the provisions Non-intercourse Act.⁹² But this assertion is implausible because the Indians had themselves underscored the fact that the state did not have the authority to detribalize the Narragansetts in open public meetings recorded by state officials before Rhode Island terminated the tribe's legal identity.⁹³ Hence, the common practice of evaluating Indigenous persons from a Eurocentric or western facing perspective hampered Simmons' work. However, as explained earlier, this study faces east in its effort to understand the historical realities created and inhabited by the Narragansetts.

Patricia E. Rubertone's *Grave Undertakings: An Archaeology of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians* is the most important and consequential book produced about the Narragansetts to date. Although the author was more circumscribed in her interpretive scope than either Boissevain or Simmons, Rubertone contends directly with enduring historical

⁹² William S. Simmons, *Indians of North America: The Narragansett* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 74. See also *Worcester v. Georgia* in note 15.

⁹³ Robert A. Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island: Keepers of the Bay* (Charlestown: History Press, 2011), 96.

misconceptions that, as the author explains, continue to inform “past-present relations.” By arguing for a more nuanced and sophisticated interpretation of the Narragansetts, Rubertone challenges some of the limited conceptualizations about the Indians canonized in Roger Williams’ *A Key Into the Language of America*. For example, the author writes that Williams’ book “informed the assumption that prehistoric coastal settlement in southern New England was seasonal” and that such “assumptions about Native mobility...helped the English lay claim to Native land and justify its dispossession.”⁹⁴ Rubertone’s book remains consequential because it not only traces the genesis of historical fallacies, it also delineates how this fictionalized past continues to play an active role in the lives of the Narragansetts “in their ongoing struggles over how their real story of survival, both then and now, has been told.”⁹⁵ However, to better comprehend the story of the Narragansetts, a longer historical scope—one that incorporates multiple time periods—than the one used by Rubertone must be considered.

More recent events like the smoke shop incident and the Carcieri decision have sparked a renewed interest in the history and experiences of the Narragansetts. Robert A. Geake’s *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island: Keepers of the Bay* brings the discussion about the tribe into the twenty-first century. The value of Geake’s work is seen through both its revitalization and continuation of the historical discourse. Geake even includes a chapter highlighting the struggles of the Narragansetts in their attempt to open a casino in Rhode Island. More than just an update, the author brings controversial historical issues to a mainstream audience, and in this way, helps to further a more complete appreciation of the historical realities associated with certain events. For example, in his chapter about “The Ghosting of a People,”

⁹⁴ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 66.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

Geake describes the deliberativeness with which state authorities pursued the detribalization of the Narragansetts. The author writes, “With this act...the ghosting of the Narragansett was complete, at least in the minds of those state politicians and Charlestown officials who had long wanted to make the tribe accept ordinary citizenship.”⁹⁶ The author’s interpretation directly contradicted a centuries-old dictum that had purported just dealings with the area’s Indigenous peoples. And although Geake was hardly the first to question this historical fallacy, it was through his work that many were first exposed to such a blatant challenge to traditional interpretations because Rubertone’s book circulated primarily among academics, Simmions had failed to seriously question the general narrative, and Boissevain’s work had been out of print for more than thirty-five years.

⁹⁶ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 97.

Chapter 2 - The Great Tree

Long before the arrival of the first Europeans, Native American societies sometimes collapsed and disappeared. Indigenous communities also merged and emerged anew having reformed and reshaped themselves in a process now referred to as ethnogenesis.⁹⁷ However, the arrival of non-Indigenous explores, traders, fishermen, and colonists along the northeastern coast of the Atlantic not only hastened the disintegration, reconstitution, and restructuring of Indigenous communities, it also significantly reframed the contours of intertribal interactions. The consequences associated with these early cross-cultural contacts, such as roving epidemics and an intensified competition for resources, compelled many Native groups to reinterpret their own social, political, and cultural boundaries. "Most of the Native American nations that survive to our day," explains Daniel Richter, "were, to one degree or another, created in the melting pot set boiling" during the seventeenth century.⁹⁸ But while the region's Indigenous peoples sought to reform and reaffirm themselves, they contended not only with the mercurial interests of Native rivals but also with the expanding ambitions of the newcomers.

In the aftermath of a violent conflict that witnessed the collapse of one of the region's principal Indigenous communities, the Narragansett sachem Miantonomi explained to a European audience that "We are as a great tree" when other tribes were "but as a twig."⁹⁹ The statement revealed a social reality that would inform political and diplomatic decisions throughout southern New England for most of the seventeenth century. The Narragansetts

⁹⁷ Frank Rzeckowski, *Uniting The Tribes: The Rise And Fall Of Pan-Indian Community On The Crow Reservation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 5.

⁹⁸ Daniel Richter, *Facing East*, 62.

⁹⁹ Eric Johnson, "Uncas and the Politics of Contact," in *Northeastern Indian Lives 1632-1816*, ed. Robert S. Grumet (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 31.

were—as the sachem proclaimed—the region’s principle Indigenous power, and much of the realpolitik of both Indians and non-Indians was a reaction to or a consequence of Narragansett hegemony. This chapter examines how the Narragansetts understood and communicated their tribal boundaries in relation to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples during a period of increasing intercultural contacts. It also explores the ways in which—in the midst of widespread social, political, and demographic realignments—the Narragansetts worked to create, maintain, define, expand, and perpetuate the ascendancy of their community at a time when many of their neighbors—old and new—sought to limit the influence and dominion of the “great tree.” Moreover, by assessing the motivations that influenced certain decisions, acts, and policies, this chapter helps to illuminate an Indigenous worldview that was often divergent from that of their new neighbors.

in 1524, the Italian navigator Giovanni de Verrazano sailed into what is now known as Narragansett Bay and produced what historians believe to be the first written description of the people for which the waterway was named. Verrazano’s account—which identified various social, political, economic, and cultural practices—helps to illuminate an Indigenous world not yet transformed by sustained cross-cultural contacts and the prolonged settlement of Europeans. Although viewed through a distorted lens, the conditions, actions, and decisions described in the record provide a unique vantage point from which to examine some of the social, political, economic, and cultural realities crafted and experienced by the Narragansetts in the early seventeenth century. For instance, because the explorer did not meet or interact with any other Indigenous peoples while in the region, the Natives described by Verrazano must have held a position of power. Verrazano’s ship would have been visible to various polities as the navigator sailed along the coast and into Narragansett Bay. But the fact that the explorer did not mention

the presence of any other Indigenous groups suggests that the Indians he met not only held dominion over the area but that these Natives were powerful enough to forestall the ambitions and curiosities of any rivals. Moreover, news of the explorer's visit must have traveled quickly throughout the region yet Verrazano did not record meeting or trading with any other tribes even though he and his men had remained among the Narragansetts for more than two weeks.

The brief monopoly the Narragansetts held over this intercultural trade enabled the Indians to shape the terms of exchange and interaction. Verrazano explained that the Natives did “not value or care to have silk or gold stuffs.”¹⁰⁰ Nor were the Indians impressed by the European's technology. The navigator observed that the Indians were most interested in items they could use to adorn themselves.¹⁰¹ The Natives described by Verrazano were not awed or bewildered by the visitors nor were they deprived or desperate. Instead, the Narragansetts held the upper hand in the exchange as Verrazano admitted: “we remained among them fifteen days to provide ourselves with many things of which we were in want.”¹⁰² Indeed, when the navigator and his men sailed into Narragansett territory, it was the Indians who determined when, where, and what was exchanged. Verrazano's description of a Narragansett man who around his neck “wore a large chain ornamented with many stones of different colors” evidenced the ability of the Narragansetts to establish and communicate the contours of cross-cultural trade.¹⁰³ The preference of the Natives for items they could “hang in their ears and about their necks” demonstrated the capacity of the Narragansetts to incorporate and repurpose European goods into

¹⁰⁰ Giovanni da Verrazano, “Giovanni da Verrazano to His Most Serene Majesty the King of France,” in *Indian New England 1524-1674: A Compendium of Eyewitness Accounts of Native American Life*, ed. Ronald Dale Karr (Pepperell: Branch Line Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19.

their existing social, political, economic, and cultural frameworks. Historian Eric Johnson argues that the redistribution of trade goods “within the community was one of the most important ways for sachems to legitimate their positions.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, archaeological evidence also indicates that along with more traditional pieces of material culture such as shells and stones, the Narragansetts entombed their dead with European trade goods throughout the seventeenth century. “European trade goods functioned not only as traditional status goods,” writes the archaeologist George Hamell, “but also as substantial metaphors of traditional cultural value.”¹⁰⁵ Hence, the preference of the Indians for items that could be used as adornment and to communicate the status of individuals whether deceased or alive—Verrazano believed the man with the necklace to be a chief—was consistent with the Narragansetts’ established cultural, social, and political constructs. Understanding how the Indians integrated and utilized European trade goods reveals essential truths about how the Narragansetts perceived and reacted to early cross-cultural exchanges because the Indians did not merely supplant their lifeways for those of the Europeans. Nor were the Narragansetts immovable in adhering to previous behaviors and practices. Instead, the Natives were able to actively shape the contours of cross-cultural contacts by incorporating these exchanges into their existing worldview.

The fact that the Indians Verrazano met prevented exchanges and encounters between Native women and European men further demonstrated the capacity of the Narragansetts to define and dictate the terms of intercultural interactions. Verrazano complained that the Natives “made their wives stay in the boats, nor could we ever get them on board by any entreaties or any

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 240.

presents we could make them.”¹⁰⁶ Archaeologist Patricia E. Rubertone posits that the “Narragansetts’ vigilant protection of their women suggest that this was not a first encounter and that the sailors were viewed as merely lecherous humans rather than powerful, otherworldly beings.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the scholar Caper Jones argues that multiple Europeans might have visited the region before Verrazano's voyage.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that during these previous contacts intimacies between Native women and European men proved problematic because the temporality of these relationships controverted long-standing customs and traditions. Anthropologist Kathleen Bragdon explains that relationships between Indigenous “people were structured on the basis of...obligation and loyalty.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, when these first sailors departed, they might have also abandoned their newly acquired communal responsibilities. Verrazano observed that when some of his men left the ship and stayed for an extended time on an Island “for their various necessities, as sailors are wont to do” the Narragansetts “inquired about our movements, often asking us if we intended to remain there long.”¹¹⁰ In attending to their “necessities” away from the boat, it is likely that Verrazano's men perused interactions with some of the Indian women who were either forbidden or refused to board the ship. The queries of the Narragansetts might have been an attempt to assess the longer-term intentions of this group of sailors to determine if intimate relationships were appropriate given the obligations and responsibilities they entailed. But, regardless of how the Natives perceived the cross-cultural encounters between European men and Indian women, the Narragansett sought to define and dictate the parameters of intercultural exchange.

¹⁰⁶ Karr, *Indian New England*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Caper Jones, *The History and Future of Narragansett Bay* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2006), 76.

¹⁰⁹ Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 169.

¹¹⁰ Karr, *Indian New England*, 22.

Because Verrazano's account documented certain decisions, actions, and policies of the Narragansetts, elements of the Indians' unique worldview can be extrapolated from this source material. The Narragansetts were not insular but outward looking, and when Verrazano entered the bay, the Indians paddled out to meet him. When Indians boarded the vessel, it was the Europeans who were in awe, "This is the finest looking tribe...the handsomest in their costumes...more beautiful in form and stature than can possibly be described."¹¹¹ Verrazano's description suggests that the Narragansetts most likely enjoyed access to ample and diverse sources of nutrition. This abundance not only facilitated exchange as Verrazano observed, "They are very generous, giving away whatever they have," but it allowed the Narragansetts to determine the parameters of that trade.¹¹² As interactions with Europeans became more frequent and durable throughout the seventeenth century, the Narragansetts continued to conceptualize and accommodate cross-cultural transactions in ways that reflected and substantiated the Indians' particular worldview. A century later, the Narragansetts who met and interacted with English settlers also sought to establish and communicate the parameters intercultural interactions. However, these efforts proved less successful in the years following Verrazano's visit.

The first recorded interaction between the Narragansetts and English colonists was ominous and appeared to foreshadow the progression of intercultural relations throughout the region because, in the winter of 1622, the Narragansetts sent the English residing at Plymouth "a gift of several arrows wrapped in a snakeskin."¹¹³ The "gift" was surely unusual, and the Pilgrims surmised that it "was a gesture of hostility and returned the skin filled with powder and shot."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid., 19.

¹¹² Ibid., 20.

¹¹³ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 74.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Although it is impossible to know for sure what the Indians had intended to communicate by sending the snakeskin, it is likely that the gesture was meant to inform the newcomers that the Narragansetts were a formidable power.

In the years following Verrazano's departure roving epidemics decimated the area's Native population substantially reducing both the strength and dominion of the Narragansetts' chief rivals the Massachusetts and the Wampanoags. For reasons that remain unclear, these epidemics—especially the plague that stalked Native populations in the region from 1616-1619—seemed to dissipate once they reached the territorial boundaries of the Narragansetts.¹¹⁵ Spared from the terrible fate that befell their neighbors, the Narragansetts became the area's clear demographic and military hegemon.¹¹⁶ Hence, the sway the tribe held over other Indigenous polities increased, and by the time the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth, the Narragansetts had established an extensive network of tribute-paying communities throughout the region.¹¹⁷ The snakeskin was probably sent as a notice to the newcomers that their recently formed alliance with the Wampanoags placed them at odds with the region's primary powerbrokers. In fact, it was this intertribal political reality and Massasoit's—the chief sachem of the Wampanoags—displeasure with the Narragansetts' newly acquired dominance that informed sachem's decision to seek a compact with the Pilgrims. As Eric Schultz and Michael Tougias explain, in return for “ensuring the well-being of the Plymouth colonist...the Wampanoag secured a new ally against the Narragansett.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, Fisher and Silverman observe that although the less than two

¹¹⁵ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 27.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Ethel Boissevain, *The Narragansett People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1975), 11. Also see Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Eric B. Schultz and Michael J. Tougias, *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict* (Woodstock: The Countryman Press, 1999), 14.

hundred mostly diseased and malnourished settlers living in the colony “did not appear threatening. Plymouth did, however, possess exotic goods and armed soldiers that Massasoit could use to strengthen his authority among the Wampanoags and fend off the Narragansetts.”¹¹⁹ Hence, it was not the supposed superiority of European technology or lifeways that enabled the English to gain a toehold at Plymouth. Instead, it was the demographic and political upheaval spurred by the deadly epidemics unwittingly unleashed by the Europeans that informed Massasoit’s compact with the Pilgrims.

As the tribe was practically unscathed in the outbreak, the Narragansetts were keen to inform the newcomers who it was that sat atop the region’s power structure. Within this context, the snakeskin was most likely not only a message to the Pilgrims but also to local Native polities that an alliance with the settlers risked war with the Narragansetts, a war the Indians were willing to bring to Plymouth’s doorstep. Thus, just as the Narragansetts had done with Verrazano a century earlier, the Indians again sought to define and control the parameters of cross-cultural contacts. However, in time, the political deftness of their Indigenous rivals and the unbridled ambitions of the colonists conspired to circumscribe the authority and influence of the Narragansetts.

Because of the Narragansetts’ prominence, it is reasonable to assume that intercultural contacts with Plymouth should have either been directed or approved by the tribe. However, the fact that this did not happen reveals some of the critical economic, cultural, and political transformations that occurred within Indigenous communities on the eve of English colonization. As early as 1614 a regular trading post was established on an island in Narragansett Bay and although the location was not continually manned, the outpost at “Dutch Island” provided the

¹¹⁹ Fisher and Silverman, Ninigret, 28.

Indians with routine access to European trade goods.¹²⁰ According to Schultz and Tougias, the Narragansetts used these periodic exchanges to establish themselves as “wealthy middlemen” in the transatlantic fur trade.¹²¹ Because the Indians already had access to European trade goods and because the tribe now held military, economic, and demographic supremacy in the region, there was little impetus for the Narragansetts to seek the establishment of cross-cultural trade or a military alliance with the fledgling settlement at Plymouth. In fact, when the Pilgrims sent a small trading party to meet with the Narragansetts in 1623, the Pilgrims were disappointed to find that the Dutch had supplied “the Indians with cloth and other highly desirable commodities,” while the English could offer “only a few beads and knives which were not there much esteemed.”¹²² Not only were the Narragansetts apathetic about the wares proffered by the Pilgrims, but the Indians were also apparently disinterested in establishing a relationship with Plymouth. The historian Jenny Hale Pulsipher explains that “traditional political relationships shaped Indian understanding of English political systems” and informed the “agreements made between the two peoples.”¹²³ Because the Narragansetts represented a much more powerful community than that of the Pilgrims, according to the customs of Indigenous diplomacy, the only proper relationship that could have existed between the tribe and Plymouth was one in which the Pilgrims paid tribute to the Indians as a symbolic act of deference to the hegemony of the Narragansetts. But, because the English had already allied themselves with the Wampanoags and openly challenged the authority of the Narragansetts, it was clear that the English sought to

¹²⁰ Jones, *History and Future of Narragansett*, 78. Also see Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 73.

¹²¹ Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 15.

¹²² Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 54.

¹²³ Jenny Hale Pulsipher, “Subjects...Unto The Same King” in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development Sixth Edition*, ed. Stanley N. Katz, John M. Murrin, Douglas Greenberg, David J. Silverman and Denver Brunsman (New York: Routledge, 2011), 279.

establish themselves as coequals. Trade between the Narragansetts and the Pilgrims on such terms would have significantly elevated the status of the English and legitimated their fledgling community. Therefore, the continued determination of the Indians to define and control the parameters of cross-cultural exchanges contributed to the lack of contact between the Narragansetts and Plymouth.

Moreover, unlike Verrazano, the Pilgrims did not disembark in an area that was traditionally considered Narragansett territory. In fact, the colonist established their new community in a location where the settlers could make use of the fields abandoned by the Wampanoag following the most recent epidemic.¹²⁴ It is possible that the Narragansetts refrained from expanding into the area because they feared to share a fate similar to that of their neighbors. Silverman observes that in the seventeenth century, "New England Indian religious life centered on influencing the effects of spiritual power, called manit" and that this "manit flowed through the Indians' universe" and could inhabit certain places.¹²⁵ It is plausible then that the Narragansetts believed that a malicious or at least deadly manit infected the lands formerly occupied by the Wampanoags and that by avoiding these areas and performing certain rituals, the Narragansetts might maintain "good relations with the spirits" which constituted "the Indians' firmest guarantee of worldly success."¹²⁶ However, the colonist held no qualms about establishing their community on the forsaken site because what the Natives perceived as a curse, the English interpreted as a godsend. The governor of Plymouth William Bradford expressed the English point of view when he stated that the plague was really "the good hand of

¹²⁴ Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations Of The Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 61.

¹²⁵ David J. Silverman, "Indians, Missionaries, And Religious Translation: Creating Wampanoag Christianity in Seventeenth-Century Martha's Vineyard" in *Colonial America*, 42.

¹²⁶ Silverman, "Indians, Missionaries, And Religious Translation," 43. also see Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 27.

God...sweeping away great multitudes of the natives...that he might make room for us."¹²⁷ The epidemics that struck Indigenous New England did indeed make room for the colonists as the scholar Charles Mann observes, "more than fifty of the first colonial villages in New England were located on Indian communities emptied by disease."¹²⁸ But disease did more than just empty Native communities and make way for the colonists because it also provided sachems throughout the area with excess land that might be used to throw off the yoke of the Narragansetts. Massasoit's offer to leave the tiny enclave at Plymouth "in peace," even though the Pilgrims had settled in his territory, was emblematic of a diplomacy that exchanged land for protection, power, and influence.

Another reality curtailing the ability of the Narragansetts to exert their authority over the Pilgrims was the fact that Massasoit was at best a disgruntled subject. Simmons argues that from the Wampanoag leader's point of view, "the Pilgrims were potential allies against his former enemies and present overlords. He saw an opportunity to regain independence from the Narragansett sachems by allying the Wampanoag with the English."¹²⁹ And according to Mann, "Compared to the Narragansett" the colonists "were the lesser of two evils."¹³⁰ Hence, Massasoit's decided to aid the colonists as a means to insulate himself from the authority and demands of the Narragansetts. The Wampanoag sachem's motivation was evidenced by the agreement he reached with Pilgrim authorities in the spring of 1621. According to the compact, the two sides agreed that "If any did unjust warre against him [Massasoit], we [Plymouth] would

¹²⁷ Mann, *1491*, 61.

¹²⁸ Ibid.,

¹²⁹ William S. Simmions, *The Narragansett* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 35.

¹³⁰ Mann, *1491*, 63.

ayde him.”¹³¹ The Wampanoag leader quickly made use of the protection, power, and influence he obtained via his alliance with the newcomers. Just a few months after the agreement was reached, Massasoit convinced the Pilgrims to raise "an armed force to intimidate two Wampanoag sachems, Corbitant and Nepeof, who threatened to defect to the Narragansetts.”¹³² It is likely that, after appraising their options, Corbitant and Nepeof determined that Massasoit’s diplomatic maneuvering was dangerous and that it was in the best interest of the two sachems to remain loyal to the Narragansetts. But the fact that Plymouth did come to Massasoit’s aid at his moment of need proved to all who were watching that the English could provide Indigenous leaders throughout the region with an important counterbalance to the reign of the Narragansetts. For their part, the Narragansetts would not allow such a blatant challenge to their authority go unanswered, and it was then that the snakeskin arrived at the fort. Thus, the Indians answered Plymouth’s foray into the dynamics of intertribal politics in a way that the settlers understood to be threatening. The Pilgrims responded in kind, sending shot and powder to the Narragansetts. However, despite their aggressive posturing, Plymouth and the Narragansetts did not go to war over the incident. Hence, Massasoit's actions appeared to incur no discernable consequence. Instead, the sachem successfully enhanced his authority and power over the Wampanoag. "Massasoit had turned English colonization" write Fisher and Silverman "into a source of personal strength and sachems across the region...took notice.”¹³³ Indeed, Massasoit proved that an association with the English could help certain sachems to reshape the Indigenous political landscape in ways that ultimately enhanced their power and influence. And in a region

¹³¹ William Hubbard, *The History Indian Wars of New England: From The First Settlement To The Termination Of The War With King Philip In 1677* (Roxbury: Printed for W.E. Hubbard, 1865), 119.

<https://archive.org/details/historyofindianw02hubb>

¹³² Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 28.

¹³³ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 29.

devastated by disease and convulsing with the collapses, mergers, and reconstitutions of tribal identities and affiliations, opportunistic and ambitious leaders certainly “took notice” of the possibilities entailed in the establishment of cross-cultural alliances.

In 1631 the Podunk sachem Wagincut visited Plymouth and Boston where he offered the settlers land, corn, and beaver skins if they would “plant in his country.”¹³⁴ Wagincut’s appeal was unusual because the territory proffered by the sachem centered along what is today the Connecticut River, and as such, lay far beyond the boundaries of the two English strongholds. Knowing that the settlers were unfamiliar with the region, Wagincut volunteered to take some of the settlers back with him to “see the country.”¹³⁵ The Podunk sachem’s offer to the English to settle in his country illustrates the political acumen and diplomatic deftness of Native leaders. If the colonists were to accept Wagincut’s appeal, the English would have been implicitly obligated to protect the Podunk leader. This political reality was not lost on either of the Puritan governors because as the historian Alfred Cave explains, “Bradford suspected that the sachems hoped to involve the English in their quarrel with the Pequots. Winthrop concurred, noting in his journal that the leader of the delegation, the Podunk sachem Wagincut, was ‘a very treacherous man.’”¹³⁶ In fact, the Pequot had forced Wagincut from the area he offered up to the English, “and apparently he hoped” write Fisher and Silverman, “English protection would enable him to return.”¹³⁷ The parallels between the experiences and motivations of Wagincut and Massasoit were stark. Both leaders were vexed by their recent subjugation to a neighbor who had been empowered by greater access to European trade goods. And both leaders hoped that by

¹³⁴ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 65.

¹³⁵ Ibid.,

¹³⁶ Ibid.,

¹³⁷ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 33.

establishing a close association with the English they could enhance their power and influence. It is likely that Wagincut watched as Massasoit successfully interwove the colonists into his disputes and that the Podunk leader hoped to do the same. However, after having lived among the Natives for more than a decade, English leaders were more cognizant of the dynamics of intertribal politics, and neither Plymouth nor Boston was willing to defend Wagincut against his rivals. Still, in the coming years, competition for control over the same territory offered up by Wagincut would lead to the first major confrontation between the Natives and the Colonists.

The experiences of Massasoit and Wagincut illustrate that, for both Indians and non-Indians alike, early intercultural exchanges were primarily strategic decisions. These relationships were informed by a system of complex and fluid associations evidenced by the payment and collection of tribute and embodied by the establishment of alliances. When Plymouth came to Massasoit's defense, the Pilgrims were fulfilling their part of an agreement that also stated "if any did war against us [Plymouth], he [Massasoit] should aid us."¹³⁸ Although such alliances were initially expedient, in time, they proved problematic because these agreements were crafted from very distinct and often divergent worldviews. Archaeologist Lucianne Lavin explains that Indians in southern New England "share similar value systems. . . . They saw (and still do see) themselves as a part of the natural world related to all of nature, with a duty to always harmonize with and maintain the natural world order."¹³⁹ Hence, a worldview that stressed the general interdependence of people and nature helped to inform the way the Indians conceptualized cross-cultural associations. "To the natives here," writes the historian Neal Salisbury, "the settlers appeared first as other human beings with whom they had to interact

¹³⁸ Karr, *Indian New England*, 40.

¹³⁹ Lucianne Lavin, *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples: What Archaeology, History, and Oral Traditions Teach Us About Their Communities and Cultures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 277.

as best they could under the circumstances in order to maintain equilibrium in the world they shared.”¹⁴⁰ Within this context, cross-cultural interactions were, as Salisbury expounds, “defined in terms of reciprocity rather than domination and submission.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, when the region’s Indigenous peoples sought to reform and reaffirm themselves through the establishment of new associations and alliances, they did so with an appreciation for interconnectedness, reciprocity, and balance.

Moreover, the diplomacy practiced by Natives in southern New England was highly symbolic, imbued with meaning, and reflective of Indigenous people’s social and cultural beliefs. For example, although it was not part of the agreement reached between the Wampanoags and the Pilgrims, the Indians continually provisioned Plymouth with corn. Of course, it was in Massasoit’s best interest that his allies did not starve to death, but the “gifts” of corn were more than just purely strategic. For the Wampanoags, the terms of their alliance with the newcomers were not simply written on paper but also—and more importantly—embodied in practice. In supplying the colony with corn, the Indians effectively reframed their alliance into a relationship governed by reciprocity and beholden to responsibilities not spelled out in the original agreement. “Gifts or presents,” explains Paul A. Robinson, “were used by Indian people to establish and represent symbolically social and political obligations. Acceptance of gifts inferred acceptance of obligations to givers.”¹⁴² For the Indians, provisioning the colony meant reinterpreting the newcomers as “fellow members of a regional social network whose members

¹⁴⁰ Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* Kindle Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), Location 128.

¹⁴¹ Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, Locations 124-125.

¹⁴² Paul A. Robinson, *Miantonomi and the English*, 19.

cemented their ties through giving and receiving hospitality.”¹⁴³ In fact, the relations between the two groups grew so familiar that the Pilgrims had to ask the Indians to stop making social trips to their community. Later, the Indians were surprised to learn that the social, political, and cultural capital that they had invested in their non-Indigenous neighbors was not to be reciprocated. Just before the outbreak of King Philip’s War the Wampanoags asserted that when they first came, the English were as little children and Massasoit was a great man. “He [Massasoit] constrained other Indians from wronging the English and gave them corn,” but now that the two groups exchanged positions, the colonists failed to reciprocate.¹⁴⁴ For their part, the newcomers certainly recognize how their Native neighbors interpreted these intercultural relationships. But, as Salisbury posits, for many English “the Indians represented the complete inversion of the world they sought for themselves as well as the concrete obstacle to their attaining it.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, what lay at the heart of the discontinuity observed by the Wampanoags was the fact that when Europeans and Native Americans met they held what historian Gary B. Nash claimed were “incompatible ways of looking at the world.”¹⁴⁶ However, holding different outlooks did not mean that mortal combat was inevitable because both side made accommodations when such actions were expedient. But as Native peoples grew weaker so did their ability to define the parameters and meanings of cross-cultural exchanges. But the flames of conflict were not only fanned by ideological incongruities because the political maneuverings of ambitious and opportunistic Indian leaders also provided the accelerant.

¹⁴³ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁴ Richter, *Facing East*, 105.

¹⁴⁵ Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, Location 128.

¹⁴⁶ Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, And Black: The Peoples of Early America* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1982), 25.

As Wagincut's appeal to Plymouth and Boston demonstrated, by the 1630s, the Pequot were a formidable power having incorporated or subjugated many Indigenous polities in the river valleys of what would become eastern and central Connecticut. But whereas Wagincut was unable to enlist the assistance of the colonists, Uncas—the chief sachem of the Mohegan during much of the seventeenth century—successfully used the English to “break out of the Pequot confederation.”¹⁴⁷ Hence, the political, social, and economic calculations of Puritan leaders evolved during the six years bookended by Wagincut's offer and what has come to be known as the Pequot War 1636-37.¹⁴⁸ Abetting this shift in diplomacy was the fact that the Massachusetts Bay Colony—and the Plymouth Colony to a lesser extent—experienced a surge in population throughout the 1630s during a period referred to as The Great Migration. More than thirteen thousand English settlers arrived in Massachusetts between 1629 and 1640, transforming what once were fledgling Puritan outposts into colonial strongholds which “had become as powerful a force as any of the region's major tribes.”¹⁴⁹ The rapid growth of settler communities was juxtaposed by a sharp decline in the region's Indigenous population because, in 1633, an outbreak of smallpox ravaged Native communities throughout southern New England.¹⁵⁰ It was in this context that Uncas sought to cultivate an alliance with the English hoping to capitalize on the demographic upheavals to strengthen his position. And to this end, the Mohegan leader was perhaps the region's greatest political tactician. He was undoubtedly among the most successful because—with the help of his English patrons—Uncas worked to successfully curtail both the

¹⁴⁷ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 35.

¹⁴⁸ In naming the conflict with the Indians the “Pequot War”—and later “King Philip's War”—Euro-Americans attempted to not only assign blame, but also to assert the validity of their endeavor. See: Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, Vintage Books, 1998), xiv-xivii.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 27.

dominion and authority of the region's two most prominent Indigenous communities placing himself in their stead. Hence, examining the political maneuverings of Uncas provides insight into the workings and consequences of intertribal politics. Moreover, tracing the Mohegan leader's rise to prominence offers a glimpse of how some native peoples both conceptualized and sought to effect changing social, political, and economic realities.

Before Uncas "turned to the English...to cultivate an alliance with them" the Mohegan leader had already failed at least five times to extend his authority among the Pequot.¹⁵¹ With each unsuccessful attempt, Uncas was forced to seek refuge among the Narragansetts and was only allowed to resettle within Pequot territory after "he humbled himself to the Pequot Sachem."¹⁵² Hence, like Massasoit, Uncas brooded under the yoke of his Indigenous overlords. And like Massasoit, Uncas found in the English not only a pathway out of subordination but also a means by which to enhance his authority and dominion. The death of Tatobem—the grand sachem of the Pequot—precipitated Uncas' attempts to extend his influence. The Mohegan leader was related to the Pequot principal through marriage. Hence, Uncas contended with Sassacus—Tatobem's son and Uncas' brother in law—for power after the death of the grand sachem. But until he allied himself with the English, Uncas was repeatedly "humbled." Then, in 1634, a group of Pequot warriors seeking atonement for the execution of Totobem, killed Captain John Stone mistaking the English sailor for the Dutch traders who decapitated the sachem.¹⁵³ The Pequot apologized to the leaders of the Bay Colony explaining that "we know no difference between the Dutch and the English, they are both strangers to us, we took them all to

¹⁵¹ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 31.

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 34.

be one.”¹⁵⁴ It appears that the Puritans “were initially satisfied” with the apology and disinclined “to press the matter” according to Cave.

However, Uncas used the incident to cultivate and inflame animosities between the Pequot and the English. He told colonial authorities that Sassacus was directly involved in Stone's death and that the Pequot secretly plotted to attack English settlements "out of desperate madness."¹⁵⁵ The conspiracy described by Uncas was precisely what the Puritans feared since they first heard of Opechacanough's butchering of colonists in Virginia in 1622. Bay Colony leaders such as the Reverend Philip Vincent saw the incident as evidence that "savages" could never be trusted and that the Puritans must be resolved never to repeat the mistakes of their southern brethren.¹⁵⁶ Hence, by claiming that the Pequot were desperate, mad, and ready to attack, Uncas appealed to settlers' ever-present suspicion that they were surrounded by bloodthirsty “savages” who were “diligent to sute an opportunitye to their Natures.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the “desperate madness” to which the Mohegan leader referred more aptly described the dread harbored by many colonists who huddled together in isolated communities forever fearful of the “howling wilderness” and the “savages” it concealed, a reality which Uncas was keen to exploit.

As explained earlier, over time, divergent worldviews led Indians and non-Indians to interpret cross-cultural associations very differently. While many Indians framed intercultural relationships within an ethos that stressed interconnectedness and reciprocity, some colonists conceptualized their associations with Natives in accordance with a racialized dogma that cast the region's Indigenous population as wicked and abhorrent. It was within this context that

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 32.

¹⁵⁶ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 109.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 74.

Miantonomi reminded the newcomers of the Narragansetts' status as a "great tree." But, it was not that the English failed to recognize tribal distinctions or the political, demographic, and martial preeminence held by the Narragansetts when they sought to conflate the tribe with the area's other Indigenous polities. Instead, this consolidation constituted a deliberate attempt to assert a worldview in which all Indian peoples—regardless of tribal affiliations—were perceived as the unholy and unworthy occupants of a landscape that rightfully belonged to the newcomers. By this doctrine, the Puritans fashioned themselves as "the modern descendants of the Children of Israel" and Native peoples as "the pagan Egyptians and Babylonians."¹⁵⁸ New England was interpreted as a gift bestowed on Christians by God and the manifestation of his divine providence. Puritan leader Reverend Increase Mather expressed a view held by many when he explained that the Lord "hath given us for rightfull Possession" the lands formerly held by "the Heathen People" as punishment for their plotting against "English Israel."¹⁵⁹ Historian Billy J. Stratton explains that the "Native peoples Puritan migrants encountered were perceived early on as primary obstacles to the achievement of their religio-historical vision."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, while many Native peoples saw the newcomers as cohabiters of an interconnected world, some English viewed the Indians as an impediment to the realization of God's blessings.

The necessity of accommodation in early intercultural interactions was clearly evidenced by the alliance crafted between Plymouth and the Wampanoags. But as the Indians' later condemnation of the Pilgrims shows, this era of mutuality was fleeting and hastened by Euro-American preconceptions of Native peoples. For example, Stratton argues that, "Due to the

¹⁵⁸ Billy J. Stratton, *Buried In Shades Of Night: Contested Voices, Indian Captivity, And The Legacy of King Philip's War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁵⁹ Stratton, *Buried In Shades of Night*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Stratton, *Buried In Shades of Night*, 3.

deeply ingrained cultural biases that were already well-established . . . English settlers were not inclined to view the Indigenous inhabitants of the land . . . as peoples vested with the same rights that been granted to them by God.”¹⁶¹ Exactly when and to what extent this predisposition informed cross-cultural associations has been an area of contention among historians. Karen Kupperman explains that the English were not as dismissive of Indigenous culture, technology, religion, and people as chroniclers often suggest. The author argues that “It was the ultimate powerlessness of the Indians, not their racial inferiority, which made it possible to see them as people without rights.”¹⁶² But prior to the outbreak of King Philip’s War, the Indigenous peoples of southern New England were far from powerless. “For a time in the spring of 1676,” write Shultz and Tougias, “it appeared to the colonists that the entire English population . . . might be driven back into a handful of fortified seacoast cities.”¹⁶³ If the Indians were a formidable foe in 1676, they were certainly equally so four decades earlier when the English sought to annihilate the Pequot, man, woman, and child. Hence, citing the “powerlessness” of the Native inhabitants is an inadequate explanation for the ruthlessness of Euro-Americans.

Ronald Karr suggests that the overt acts of violence committed during the Pequot War “resulted from the failure to establish reciprocity between the military cultures of the English Puritan forces and the Pequot.”¹⁶⁴ However, Karr also admits that it is difficult to account for some of the war’s atrocities “without concluding that the Puritans regarded their Indian enemies as less human than even their most despised English foes. European enemies would never be

¹⁶¹ Stratton, *Buried In Shades of Night*, 2.

¹⁶² Karen Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 188.

¹⁶³ Schultz and Tougias, *King Phillip’s War*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Karr, Ronald Dale. ““Why Should You Be So Furious?”: The Violence of the Pequot War.” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (1998): 909. <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/2567215>.

treated this way.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, Cave observes that Puritan preconceptions about the regions Indigenous peoples proved “particularly intractable” because they were part of a “hegemonic ideology” that was used to “rationalize and sustain claims of power and justify expropriation of resources.”¹⁶⁶ Regardless of exactly when the religious and cultural biases of the Puritans become intractable, there was no greater obstacle to the realization of God's gift and the achievement of the Puritans' historical vision than the hegemony of the Narragansetts. For the settlers to claim dominion in the area the influence and authority of the tribe needed to be curtailed. Therefore, while the Narragansetts worked to reshape their community and redefine themselves throughout the seventeenth century, they did so against a backdrop in which the Indians were purposefully characterized as devious, unholy, and irredeemable as a means by which to justify the presence of the Puritans and the seemingly benign, inevitable, and providential dispossession of the Natives. Thus, the Narragansetts then contended not only with the mercurial interests of Indigenous rivals but also with the expanding ambitions of the newcomers.

Conceptualizations of the region's Indigenous population as obstructive, unholy, and undeserving were coupled with a dread that gripped settler societies in southern New England during the mid-1630s. The internal spiritual strife known as the “Antinomian Controversy,” heightened Puritan insecurities and informed the way colonists perceived the Indigenous peoples that surrounded them. The chronicler Karyn Valerius explains that “disagreement over the relationship between sanctification” or “the daily course of living a godly life, and justification, a Puritan term for election by God, created a rift in the colony that had widespread

¹⁶⁵ Karr, “Why So Furious?,” 908.

¹⁶⁶ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 10.

ramifications.”¹⁶⁷ According to the scholar Anne Kibbey, some of these ramifications reverberated throughout Indigenous communities. Kibbey argues that religious insecurities “established the legitimacy of genocidal war against non-white peoples.”¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the historian Gary Nash writes that “Dead Pequots were offered to God as atonement for Puritan fallings.”¹⁶⁹ What Uncas and his tales of an Indian conspiracy offered the Puritans was an opportunity to prove the divinity of their endeavor and justification for pursuing the realization of their religio-historical vision, no matter how bloody the outcome. But the Mohegan leader also gained something in the exchange. “Through the careful cultivation of Anglo-Pequot animosities,” writes Cave, “Uncas would help precipitate a war that would enable him to achieve his goal and take the place of the Pequot grand sachem.”¹⁷⁰ Hence, the exigencies associated with dogmatic uncertainties, a general fear of an impending Indian attack, and longstanding beliefs that Indian peoples were savage and wicked, abetted Uncas’ diplomatic maneuvering transforming the Mohegan leader from a Pequot underling to an English confidant and compatriot, and finally to one of the region's most potent Indigenous leaders.

As stated, prior to the Pequot War, the Narragansetts were the area’s hegemonic Indigenous power. Thus, when the tribe decided to ally with the English settlers, they did so as—at the very least—coequals. In fact, the leadership in Boston found it necessary to meet with the Narragansetts before pursuing war with the Pequot to solicit the tribe’s support and neutrality.¹⁷¹ Unlike the delegation from Plymouth that met with the Narragansetts in 1623, by 1636 the

¹⁶⁷ Karyn Valerius, ““So Manifest a Signe from Heaven”: Monstrosity and Heresy in the Antinomian Controversy.” *The New England Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2010): 182. <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/20752690>.

¹⁶⁸ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷¹ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 37.

Bostonians represented a much larger and well-established community with whom an affiliation might have proved advantageous, or at least, could not be interpreted as diminishing to the Indians. Still, crafting an agreement with the tribe would require “many travels and charges” according to the Puritan outcast turned Narragansett tenant, Roger Williams.¹⁷² Residing on land provided to him by the Narragansetts, Williams was in a unique position to advocate on behalf of the English. In fact, Williams’s assistance proved so pivotal that the Puritan leader John Winthrop suggested that “Williams be recalld [sic] from Banishment” because of his interceding with the Indians.¹⁷³ However, securing an understanding with the Narragansetts was much too important of a task to be left to only one man. In the fall of 1636, the Bay Colony sent “a formal delegation to negotiate a military alliance” with the Narragansetts.¹⁷⁴ Edward Johnson, one of the diplomats sent to parley with the Indians, fretted that if the two parties failed to reach an agreement the Bay Colony might be attacked by a large contingent of Narragansett warriors.¹⁷⁵ Johnson was relieved to find that the colonists were not rebuffed but instead “entertain’d [sic] royally” by the Indians.¹⁷⁶ However, the envoy was unable to secure an alliance with the Narragansetts leaving Williams to urge the Indians into meeting once again with the leaders of the Bay Colony, but this time in Boston. It is likely that the English hoped to impress the Narragansetts by inviting the Indians into their stronghold. Indeed, before the negotiations commenced, the two parties dined together, and one can imagine that the Indians were entertained and treated in a similar manner to which they had received the colonists just a few months earlier. The exchanges and merrymaking were intended to ingratiate the two peoples to

¹⁷² Cave, *The Pequot War*, 124.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 126.

each other and therefore establish a more solid base upon which to craft an agreement. Pulsipher explains that Indians throughout New England framed, characterized, and solidified alliances between coequals with “mutual gift giving” and mutual assistance. The fact that the English and the Narragansetts reached an agreement in Boston when just a few months earlier no such understanding could be achieved suggest that the Indians were not only pleased with their reception, but also with the terms of the treaty itself.

There is no doubt that language and cultural misunderstandings contributed to differing interpretations of the stipulations and parameters of the agreement crafted in Boston. In fact, when the compact was reached the Narragansetts objected that they did not understand all of the treaty’s provisions.¹⁷⁷ However, it is also likely that both sides sought to exploit misconceptions to strengthen their political position and standing after the war. For example, soon after their victory over the Pequot, Puritan leaders began making demands of the Narragansetts as the English attempted to assert their newly won authority over all of the region’s Indigenous polities. As Fisher and Silverman write, “The English acted as though their victory over the Pequots gave them automatic rights to all the spoils.”¹⁷⁸ The central contention that erupted between the colonists and the Narragansetts after the war—which was the fate of the surviving Pequot—reveals much about how the two peoples saw themselves in relation to their Indigenous and non-Indigenous neighbors. Because, as explained earlier, many English interpreted Native peoples as irredeemable savages who performed the Devil’s work, the newcomers sought nothing less than the complete extermination of the Pequots.¹⁷⁹ The Puritan attack on a Pequot stronghold in Mystic left no misconceptions about what the English endeavored to accomplish. After setting

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹⁷⁸ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 41.

¹⁷⁹ Stratton, *Buried In Shades Of Night*, 2.

the fort ablaze, the Puritans surrounded the encampment and shot down anyone who tried to escape leaving the great majority of the Indians to burn, man, woman, and child.¹⁸⁰ The scene was so gruesome that rank and file soldiers “were distressed by the cold-blooded slaughter of Indians fleeing the burning village.”¹⁸¹ However, others found solace in the flames as William Bradford later wrote, “It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same...but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave praise to God.”¹⁸² For the Narragansetts, the massacre was too much to endure, and the vast majority abandoned the English effort decrying the tactics employed by the newcomers saying “mach it mach it,—that is’ it is naught, it is naught because it is too furious and slays too many men.”¹⁸³ After the “sweet sacrifice” in Mystic, the Puritans, along with their Mohegan allies, hunted down many of the remaining Pequots killing some and selling others into slavery. In an unabashed attempt to supplant the tribe, Puritan leaders even went so far as to forbid any survivors from uttering the name of the Pequots.

While English settlers attempted to exterminate the Pequots, the Narragansetts hoped to incorporate the remnants of their vanquished foes into the tribe. “People were the scarcest resource,” explains Richter, “of all in the Indians’ new world.”¹⁸⁴ The Narragansetts saw the Pequots not as irredeemable and eternal enemies but rather as a means by which to expand and strengthen their community. In fact, before the attack in Mystic, Narragansett leaders sought and received assurances from the Puritans that women and children would not be harmed.¹⁸⁵ The

¹⁸⁰ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 152.

¹⁸¹ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 151.

¹⁸² Ibid., 152.

¹⁸³ Geake, *A History*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Richter, *Facing East*, 62.

¹⁸⁵ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 76.

demand was in keeping with longstanding customs which saw individuals and even whole communities moving from the protection and dominion of one polity to another as political realities and fortunes changed. The English were aware of these social migrations, and some settlers even suspected that the Narragansetts had only participated in the Pequot War "to augment their own kingdom" as they wanted to be "the only lords of the Indians."¹⁸⁶ Moreover, the permeability of tribal affiliations was demonstrated by Uncas because the Mohegan leader was also a member of the Pequot aristocracy—hence his ability to challenge Sassacus for control—who at the same time retained close ties to the Narragansetts—hence his various retreats seeking protection from the tribe. The intent of the Narragansetts to integrate the defeated Pequot was indicative of the social and political traditions that existed throughout the region, because, in the seventeenth century, tribal affiliations were not as rigid as some writers have supposed. For example, when Puritan leaders questioned the efforts of certain Narragansetts to shelter and protect some of the remaining Pequots the Indians responded that “the Pequot were good Men, their friends, and they would Fight for them, and protect them.”¹⁸⁷ What is most revealing about the exchange is not the fact that the Narragansetts inserted themselves between the English and the Pequots as the protectors of the latter, but the reality that tribal demarcations were more porous than many chroniclers have suggested because the Narragansetts apparently held no qualms about referring to their supposed long-term rivals as “good men” and “friends.”

According to some chroniclers, the Narragansetts and the Pequots were bitter enemies even before the arrival of the first Europeans.¹⁸⁸ And the conventional narrative contends that this rivalry intensified as the two tribes jockeyed for access to European trade goods and

¹⁸⁶ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 45.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸⁸ Boissevain, *The Narragansett People*, 16.

domination of the fur and wampum trades.¹⁸⁹ One contemporary even recalled how the Pequot derided the Narragansetts as “women-like men.”¹⁹⁰ Within this context, then, it is surprising that the Narragansetts sought to protect their former enemies from their new allies. And if the animosities between the two tribes were as fraught as some have suggested, then the shift that took place after Mystic was a remarkable example of the fluid nature of Indigenous communal affiliations. However, because as explained earlier, the delineation of tribal social boundaries was not as rigid as often supposed, it is likely that the Narragansetts and the Pequots were not as adversarial as commonly portrayed. In fact, many sources contend that before the war the Pequot sent emissaries to the Narragansetts to enlist their support against the English with the foreboding message that if the Narragansetts failed to join the Pequot in alliance against the newcomers “they did but make the way for their own overthrow.”¹⁹¹ However, the Pequot were rebuffed because, as one writer observed, “Intertribal disputes seemed more important then, in the early 17th century than the European threat.”¹⁹² But why, if the Narragansetts were such bitter rivals, would the Pequots hope that their appeal to pan-Indianism would have met any other outcome?

There are a few possible scenarios that help to explain why the Pequots might have appealed to the Narragansetts in hopes of forming an alliance. First, as described, the Pequots and the Narragansetts were not the hard-worn enemies some have supposed. Settlers did not meet the rumors of the possibility of a Pequot-Narragansett alliance with disbelief but dread. Williams recalled how the leaders of the Bay Colony “requested me to use my utmost and

¹⁸⁹ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹² Boissevain, *The Narragansett People*, 18.

Speediest Endeavors to break and hinder the league labored for by Pequots.”¹⁹³ The fact that the colonists not only believed that an alliance between the Narragansetts and Pequots was possible, but that the settlers also actively sought to thwart the compact, reveals that the English did not see the differences between the two peoples as irreconcilable.

Another—and possibly concurring—reason why the Pequots might have sought an alliance with the Narragansetts was that, as Uncas had claimed, the Indians were indeed in a state of desperation. But, the “desperation” described by Uncas seems to have applied more appropriately to the English. In fact, until just before the outbreak of hostilities, the Pequots sought to reestablish and further peaceful relations with the settlers.¹⁹⁴ For example, in 1636 when John Endecott’s expeditionary force sailed up the Pequot River, the soldiers were met by crowds of Pequot who shouted out “What cheer, Englishmen, what cheer, what do you come for?”¹⁹⁵ The contemporary chronicler John Underhill explained that “They [Pequots] not thinking we intended war, went on cheerfully.”¹⁹⁶ Moreover, the outcomes associated with Endecott’s ineffectual raid failed to inspire fear among the Pequot because, as an exasperated settler observed, “The Bay-men killed not a man.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, while amongst the Narragansetts Williams learned that the Pequots did not fear the English because they “Comfort themselves in this that a witch amongst them will sink the pinnacles.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, on the eve of war, the Pequots seemed to be more optimistic than desperate.

¹⁹³ Cave, *The Pequot*, 124.

¹⁹⁴ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 120.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

Finally, it is possible that the Pequots never sought to form an alliance with the Narragansetts. Because of language and cultural differences, the English were uniquely susceptible to misinformation. And, as we have seen, Uncas was a shrewd political tactician. The Mohegan leader played upon the fears of the English, and in the 1630s there was no greater threat to the settlers than a compact between the Pequots and the Narragansetts. As Cave observes, “A Pequot-Narragansett alliance would have placed in jeopardy not only the tiny Puritan settlements in Connecticut but the parent colonies as well.”¹⁹⁹ European conceptualizations about Indigenous peoples as the unholy instruments of the Devil only heighten fears making the plots revealed to them by “friendly” Indian “informants” appear not only plausible but likely.²⁰⁰ “The documentary evidence available to us,” writes Cave, “points to Uncas as the main, and perhaps the only, source of these rumors.”²⁰¹ It is conceivable that Uncas seized upon this opportunity to spread misinformation about a possible Pequot-Narragansett alliance stoking the fears of the English in hopes of turning the settlers against his traditional overlords. If this had indeed been Uncas’ intent, his plan worked to perfection.

The Puritans did not only learn of the supposed plot from Indian informants though because Williams also warned that the Pequots sought to convince the Narragansetts “that the English were minded to destroy all Indians.”²⁰² The Puritan outcast used his proximity to the Narragansetts—both physical and social—to render himself an vital liaison thus maintaining his connection to the Bostonians at a time when Puritan leaders sought to expand and empower their communities at the expense of Indigenous populations. Williams even assumed credit for

¹⁹⁹ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 123.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 123.

unilaterally breaking “to pieces the Pequots’ [Pequots] negotiation and Designe, and to make, promote, and finish, by many travells and Charges the English league with the Naheggonsike [Narragansetts] and Monhiggins [Mohegans] against the Pequots.”²⁰³ It is clear that—according to himself—Williams was instrumental in thwarting the pan-Indian alliance proving he was indeed, an indispensable ally to his once forsaken community. The account was of course only Williams' interpretation of his influence on Indigenous political developments, but the claim that he alone sundered the alliance was reiterated by chroniclers such as Simmons who wrote: "Roger Williams succeeded in persuading the Narragansett to side with the English."²⁰⁴ The relationship formed between the Narragansetts and Williams was probably a factor in tribe's decision to not ally with the Pequots, but Williams was in no position to dictate to the Indians. Instead, the Narragansetts most likely saw value in the relationship they had cultivated with the outcast, and it is possible that the Indians interpreted Williams' pleas for support similar to the way that they had viewed Uncas' request for protection. However, chroniclers failed to assign a similar influence among the Narragansetts to the Mohegan leader that they did to Williams despite the fact that both men sought and received protection from the tribe. Those who argue that Williams alone dissuaded the Narragansetts from forming a compact with the Pequots not only assign too much power and influence to Williams, they also fail to grasp the complexity of Indigenous social, political, and economic relationships. This is, of course, assuming that the Pequots did indeed appeal to the Narragansetts when it is entirely possible that they did not.

It was easy for Williams, his contemporaries, and subsequent writers to overstate the influence the Puritan outcast had among the Narragansetts because the Indians failed to write,

²⁰³ Ibid., 124.

²⁰⁴ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 38.

publish, and preserve their interpretations of this relationship. Hence, what we do know about the parameters of these early cross-cultural interactions derive primarily from the ethnocentric interpretations “of a small number of European men, each of whom pursued his own interest.”²⁰⁵ Therefore, it is important—as Richter observes—to evaluate these old records in new ways in an attempt to better gleam an Indigenous perspective from the documents produced by non-Indigenous peoples. For example, in 1637 Narragansett sachems gave what would become Prudence Island to Williams and the leaders of the Bay Colony. According to Williams, the island was a gift and “truth is, not a penny was demanded.”²⁰⁶ But if the event is interpreted in accordance with traditional Indigenous conceptualizations about the meaning behind and utility of exchange, then the “gift” takes on a wholly different connotation. As we have seen, gift giving among native peoples was deeply meaningful because these exchanges defined relationships and communicated social roles and obligations. It is possible then that—as Robinson posits—the Narragansett hoped to “control the English by gifting them into debt.”²⁰⁷ For his part, Williams was already deeply indebted to the Indians because the Puritan outcast—who advocated compensating Native peoples for their land—had by his admission not paid a cent for the territory upon which he had hoped to build God’s Providence. But what the Indians offered Williams and his followers was more than just land because—like they had done for Uncas—the Narragansetts provided the outcasts with a refuge. In fact, The United Colonies of New England—a military pact between Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven that overtly excluded the Rhode Island settlements—saw the Narragansetts as a bulwark and

²⁰⁵ Paul A. Robinson, “Lost Opportunities: Miantonomi and the English in Seventeenth-Century Narragansett Country” in *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 15.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.,

“buttress to the independence of heterodox Rhode Island.”²⁰⁸ But like Uncas and the Mohegan, Williams and his followers were “but a twig” and their association with the “great tree” reflected this reality.

“It is a strange *truth*,” observed Williams, “that a man shall generally finde more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these *Barbarians* [Narragansetts], then amongst thousands that call themselves *Christians*.”²⁰⁹ But as explained, Williams found more than just entertainment and refreshment because amid the Indians he discovered a sanctuary. Williams wrote glowingly of his Indigenous sponsors stating that “I have acknowledged amongst them an heart sensible of kindnesses, and have reaped kindness.”²¹⁰ It is likely the Narragansetts believed the kindness, protection, and land conveyed to Williams came with certain obligations. For example, when Puritan and Narragansett leaders negotiated the terms of their alliance in 1636, the Indians insisted that Williams be sent a copy of the agreement so that he could interpret the document for them.²¹¹ The incident not only revealed that the Narragansetts believed Williams’ assistance was implicit, but also that the Indians expected the outcast to labor in their best interest. It is clear then that some Narragansetts thought differently of Williams than they did of the leaders in Boston. According to the region’s common political traditions, Williams’ acceptance of the kindnesses proffered by the Indians not only saddled the outcast with certain obligations but these “gifts” also worked to integrate Williams more firmly into the Narragansett community. For example, when Williams established a trading post at Cocumscussoc in present-day North Kingstown, he complained that the Indians frequented his establishment too often and

²⁰⁸ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, xi.

²⁰⁹ Roger Williams, *A Key*, 16.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹¹ Cave, *The Pequot War*, 128.

lingered too long. But such practices were indicative of Indigenous culture as Williams observed when he wrote, “they [Narragansetts] are remarkably free and courteous, to invite all Strangers in; and if any come to them upon any occasion, they request them to *come in*.”²¹² Apparently, the Indians expected that Williams would not just live among them but also incorporate certain elements of their lifestyle. Hence, the sociability that Williams scorned was not only emblematic of his close association with the Indians, but also of the behavioral norms entailed therein. Indeed, Williams became so politically, socially, and economically intertwined with the Narragansetts that he felt obligated to reassure the Puritan leadership that “I am not yet turned Indian.”²¹³ Although he did not *turn* Indian, there is little doubt that Williams’ Indigenous benefactors anticipated that the relationship forged between the outcast and the Indians dictated that Williams would pursue the tribe’s interest in many of his social, political, and economic dealings. For instance, in 1640, when Miantonomi was summoned to Hartford to answer charges about an alleged conspiracy, the sachem asked that Williams be allowed to serve as his interpreter instead of the “Pequot maid” proffered by the colonists.²¹⁴ Although Miantonomi’s appeal was denied, the sachem’s request was indicative of not just the prevailing political and diplomatic conditions, but also of specific social and cultural realities. Miantonomi trusted that Williams would be more faithful to the concerns of the Narragansetts in the proceedings than the Pequots not because the outcast could better translate the sachems’ words and intents, but because Williams was more closely allied with the tribe and their overall interest. Hence, the determinative factors here were not ones of language and culture, but of association and obligation.

²¹² Williams, *A Key*, 7.

²¹³ Robinson, *Northeastern Indians Lives*, 16.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

The refusal of colonial leaders to accommodate Miantonomi's request that Williams be allowed to serve as interpreter was emblematic of a new political and diplomatic calculus. Whereas the Puritans had previously sought to avoid confrontation with the Narragansetts, colonial leaders—emboldened by their victory over the Pequots—now looked to exert their authority over all of the region's Indigenous polities. Within this context, Williams' role as intermediary became less critical because English leaders now sought to humble Miantonomi and the Narragansetts instead of negotiating with and accommodate them. This shift in statecraft also abetted the rise of Indian leaders who—like many newcomers—hoped to see the Narragansetts subdued. With the Pequots defeated, only the Narragansetts prevented Uncas and the Mohegans from claiming supremacy among the regions Indigenous communities. But, as Fisher and Silverman observe, "Uncas first had to convince the English that the Narragansett represented a threat to them too, not just him."²¹⁵ To this end, the Mohegan leader began to undermine the English-Narragansett alliance even before the attack on the Pequot fort by telling Commander Mason on the eve of the raid that the "Narragansett would leave us, but as for himself He would never leave us."²¹⁶ The fact that many Narragansetts—disgusted with the brutal tactics employed by the English—did indeed abandon the effort only helped to bolster Uncas' credibility among the colonists. Later, Uncas told colonial leaders that "This heart (laying his hand upon his breast) is not mine but yours; I have no men; they are all yours...I will not believe any Indian's words against the English."²¹⁷ The Mohegan principal's abrupt rise from refugee to one of the region's most consequential Indian leaders must be understood within this context. Long driven by his ambitions, Uncas had at last located in the colonists the means by

²¹⁵ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 43.

²¹⁶ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 33.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

which to usurp the authority of his Indigenous overlords. By committing his men to the English, Uncas was attempting to craft a cross-cultural alliance reminiscent of the pact between Massasoit and Plymouth. But in pledging his heart and continued loyalty to the newcomers, the Mohegan leader looked to forge an even closer association with the English not unlike the relationship crafted between Williams and the Narragansetts. The Mohegan leader likely hoped that if the English accepted his offer, they would not only be obligated to protect and defend their Indigenous patron but that they would also liken Uncas' success with that of their own. The fact that—in the aftermath of the Pequot war—some colonists attempted to equate the interest and concerns of the Mohegans with that of the Narragansetts was a testament Uncas' skill as a political and diplomatic tactician. An exasperated and perplexed Miantonomi questioned the recent elevation of Uncas and his followers when he explained that: “These [Mohegans] are but as a twig, we [Narragansetts] are as a great tree.”²¹⁸ The Narragansett leader was trying to communicate a political reality already understood by Indigenous peoples throughout the region, that the Mohegan were traditionally a subordinate tribe. But as Johnson explains, Uncas used his alliance with the colonist “to attack and to defend himself from his Native enemies.”²¹⁹ The English were often quite happy to oblige the Mohegan sachem “especially when doing so coincided with their interest.”²²⁰ And felling the great tree seemed to be in the interest of many of the region's more ambitious leaders.

The defeat of the Pequots created a power vacuum that extended across the sound into what is now Long Island. There the Montauk—a tribe that had previously paid tribute to the Pequot—were confronted with a choice. To whom should the Indians now send their tribute, the

²¹⁸ Robinson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 31.

²¹⁹ Johnson, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 37.

²²⁰ Ibid.

English or the Narragansetts? Such was the dilemma that befell many of the region's Indigenous polities following the war. Various Narragansett sachems paddled across the sound in hopes of enlisting the support, loyalty, and tribute of the Montauk.²²¹ But the Montauk leader Wyandanch saw in the Pequot loss an opportunity to enhance his standing by opposing the attempts of the Narragansetts to expand their influence.²²² "Wyandanch viewed the Narragansetts as his biggest threat," explain Fisher and Silverman, "and the English as a resource to exploit."²²³ Because Wyandanch was in no position to resist the Narragansetts on his own, the Montauk leader sought to establish a cross-cultural alliance—not unlike the ones perused by Massasoit and Uncas—with the leaders of the Connecticut colonies. Soon after declaring his alliance and loyalty to the newcomers, Wyandanch tested this relationship when he protested, "How can I pay tribute to the English...if they allow the Niantics or others to steal it from me at will?"²²⁴ The Montauk leader was complaining that Ninigret—a Niantic leader who was so closely related to the Narragansetts and who, in time, would become the chief sachem of the merged tribe—had humiliated him and took thirty fathoms of wampum because Wyandanch refused to submit to the authority of the Niantic leader. When the Montauk leader tried to explain that his tribe was now under the protection of the English Ninigret supposedly told him that the English would "speak much but doe little."²²⁵ Whether Wyandanch's account was true, false, or some gradient therein, the outcome must have been what the Montauk leader hoped for because the colonists intervened on his behalf securing the return of the wampum.

²²¹ John A. Strong, "Wyandanch: Sachem of the Montauks," in *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 52-3. Both Ninigret and Miantonomi asked the Montauk for their support.

²²² *Ibid.*, 52. Wyandanch was supposedly stripped naked and beaten for refusing to obey the Narragansett sachem.

²²³ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 43.

²²⁴ Strong, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 53.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

However, the next accusation that Wyandanch levied toward the Narragansetts would inspire the settlers to both speak and do even more. Two years after Wyandanch claimed he was humiliated by Ninigret, the Montauk leader brought the colonists disturbing news about Miantonomi's attempts to build a grand alliance to destroy all the English settlements.²²⁶ The allegation was eerily reminiscent of the claims Uncas made about the Pequot and the English responded in much of the same way they had three years earlier by immediately preparing for war. At first, Wyandanch reported that he was unaware of the specific details of the coming attack because Miantonomi had spoken to Montauk leaders while the sachem was away.²²⁷ Later, the full plot was revealed only after Wyandanch deceived tribal elders into divulging the plan. Supposedly, having realized their mistake, the Montauk leaders quickly appealed to Miantonomi to call off the attack which the Narragansett sachem promptly did.²²⁸ The implications of the account are clear. Because of his dogged persistence and loyalty, Wyandanch single-handedly saved all of the English settlements from certain disaster. Again, whether the story was true, false, or somewhere in between, the events precipitated by Wyandanch's account worked to strengthen the Montauk leader's position. Regardless of its veracity, the tale exposed the fact that Wyandanch's authority over the Montauk was by no means complete. Spooked by the story, and hoping to cut off the access and sway Miantonomi maintained among the Montauk, Puritan leaders "concluded that Wyandanch's influence over his elders had to be strengthened by English economic and military support."²²⁹ After summoning the Narragansett leader to Boston to face the conspiracy charges, English leaders commissioned an armed sloop to patrol the sound

²²⁶ Ibid., 54.

²²⁷ Ibid.,

²²⁸ Ibid.,

²²⁹ Ibid.,

in hopes of preventing the Narragansetts from continuing to undermine Wyandanch's authority.²³⁰ The outcome must have been exactly what the Montauk sachem hoped for because, as the historian, John A. Strong writes, "Few Long Island sachems would challenge openly any leader who could draw upon this level of support from the English."²³¹ Even before the arrival of the colonist, Indigenous leaders would have competed with each other to fill the void created by the collapse of one of the regions principle communities. But the presence of the newcomers heightened and intensified rivalries because now—through strategically crafted alliances—smaller and traditionally subordinate groups could enter the fray. Leaders such as Massasoit, Uncas, and Wyandanch exploited these new political and diplomatic realities in hopes of furthering their unique agendas.

Wagincut's failure and the successes of Massasoit, Uncas, and Wyandanch proved the importance and utility of cross-cultural alliances. However, the repeated efforts of Puritan leaders to marginalize Williams and Rhode Island's colonial settlements coupled with the attempts by other Indigenous leaders to intensify and exploit rivalries between the Narragansetts and colonial authorities in Massachusetts and Connecticut meant that the Narragansetts were left without a useful ally. Therefore, when Samuel Gorton—an English settler who had already been banished from Massachusetts, Plymouth, and two towns in Rhode Island—appealed to Miantonomi for land and protection, the sachem accommodated Gorton by granting him lands held by Pomham, a disgruntled sub-sachem who sought to rid himself of Miantonomi's rule by submitting to the authority of Massachusetts. The Narragansett sachem must have known that Pomham would bring his protest directly to the Bay colony. In fact, Miantonomi probably

²³⁰ Ibid., 63.

²³¹ Ibid., 63.

counted on it. The Narragansetts were undoubtedly aware of the jurisdictional disputes that invariably arose between the colonies and that Gorton and his followers had a reputation for “being a thorn in Massachusetts’s side.”²³² By granting Gorton access to the lands held by Pomham, Miantonomi not only disciplined the disloyal sub-sachem, but he also directly challenged Massachusetts’ attempt to extend its influence and authority into areas traditionally controlled and settled by the Narragansetts. Miantonomi might have believed that his decision would force the leaders of the Bay colony to abandon Pomham and their claims of authority in Rhode Island. But when Massachusetts raised an armed force and marched into the territorial boundaries of what would become Rhode Island to root out Gorton, the leaders of the Bay colony sparked an even wider intercolonial dispute that became internationalized when the Gortonists sailed to England to take their protest directly to the King.²³³ In hopes of bolstering his claim and to decry the overreach of Massachusetts, Gorton hand-delivered a letter to Charles I from the Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Pessacus—Miantonomi having been recently murdered by Uncas. “In the letter,” writes Pulsipher, “the sachems submitted themselves, their land, and possessions to the king.”²³⁴ The move—as we have seen—was consistent with the political and diplomatic calculations made by Indigenous peoples throughout the region. But, whereas smaller polities such as the Wampanoag, Mohegan, and Montauk sought to ally with or submit to the authority of colonial leaders, the Narragansetts endeavored to subject themselves to the only entity in the region that the Indians considered to be a power greater than their own. The rationale for subjecting themselves to the authority of the king was made evident just one month after Gorton delivered the letter when Massachusetts authorities summoned Narragansett leaders

²³² Pulsipher, *Colonial America*, 283.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

to Boston. Pessacus and Canonicus refused the order explaining that they had “subjected or selves, or lands, & possessions” to “that royal King Charles.”²³⁵ And that “being subjects now unto the same king, & state yorselves are,” the Indians would do as they pleased. It is clear from the exchange that the Narragansetts believed themselves to be the equals of colonial leaders and that they would not submit themselves to the authority of the settlers. Thus, by subjecting themselves to the king, the Narragansetts attempted to force colonial leaders to recognize and admit a political and diplomatic reality that the Indians considered obvious. The Narragansetts were indeed a “great tree.” For likeminded colonial and Indigenous leaders, the Narragansetts constituted the most significant obstacle to the expansion of their authority and influence. And while Uncas and Wyandanch worked to undermine the tribe’s dominion, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Plymouth encouraged and sanctioned the execution of its leadership.²³⁶ Colonial and Indian leaders would spend the next thirty years attempting to curtail and undercut the sway the Narragansetts held throughout the region.

Since at least 1524, the Narragansetts constituted a distinct and consequential community in what would come to be known as southern New England. In fact, it was the reality of Narragansett dominance that influenced and shaped the direction and progression of many of the region’s cross-cultural associations. But the alliances and relationships crafted between Indigenous and colonial leaders were often conceptualized and understood in different ways shaped by two often discordant worldviews. Although specific Indigenous groups, at times, formed alliances and closer associations with particular individuals, these relationships were mostly viewed by the colonists as ephemeral. The Narragansetts, Wampanoags, Mohegans, and

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 52. As its first official act, the United Colonies approved the murder of Miantonomi.

other Native polities in the region also understood cross-cultural associations to be strategic and expedient. But, unencumbered by the delimiting racial dogma that beset the settlers—over time—the gifts, protection, and assistance proffered by the Indians worked to recast these associations into relationships that held—for the Natives anyway—social, political, and cultural significance. For example, when Uncas offered his heart to the English he was not simply being melodramatic. Instead, the Mohegan leader was communicating how he interpreted this cross-cultural relationship. Because Uncas' fortunes were intimately tied to the military and political successes of the colonists, the sachem's statement was more than just symbolic. It is most likely that Uncas hoped his dramatic pledge would be recognized and reciprocated by his newly acquired compatriots, thereby confirming a political and social reality that the sachem knew to be true. The Mohegans and the colonists needed to act as one—with one heart—if they were to realize their ambitions. Similarly, the alliance crafted between Plymouth and the Wampanoags evolved—at least for the Indians—over time from a strategic compact to an enduring association built upon a mutual respect established by historic obligations. When it became clear that the Puritans failed to interpret this relationship in the same way as their former allies, it was then that Metacom—Wampanoag sachem and sole surviving son of Massasoit—reminded the settlers of the obligations they incurred when Massasoit was a great man and the English were as children.²³⁷ Metacom called to attention the social and political debt the colonists incurred when they accepted Massasoit's gifts of land, protection, and corn. But because many settlers held a much different interpretation about the durability of the compact reached between their forbearers and Massasoit some fifty-five years earlier, Metacom's appeal did little to slow the advance a war that would see the region's Indigenous population significantly reduced and

²³⁷ Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 29.

almost entirely dispossessed. Finally, like the Mohegans and the Wampanoags, the Narragansetts were surprised to learn that their English allies did not interpret their cross-cultural associations in the same way as the Indians. And the Narragansetts, failure to recognize this fact would cost them dearly. On their way to attack a Narragansett fort, the regiment dispatched by the United Colonies traveled in the boats provided by Rhode Island settlers and camped outside the trading post once manned and maintained by Williams. But as the contingent sailed, slept, and marched along the pathways and into the swamps of southern Rhode Island, none of the people the Narragansetts had once offered land and protection sent word to the tribe of the impending attack, and the Indians were caught unprepared for the ensuing massacre. A few months later, Williams met with Narragansett leaders as they prepared to exact their revenge on Providence and pleaded with Indians to spare his settlement. But it was too late. The attack on the fort and—principally—Rhode Island’s failure to fulfill what the Narragansetts saw as the settlers’ social, political, and military responsibilities—obligations incurred by the colonists when they accepted the land and protection of the Narragansetts—destroyed whatever influence Williams had maintained among the Narragansetts and the Indians burned every building in Providence to the ground.²³⁸ It is clear then that how colonial and Indigenous leaders interpreted the meaning and significance of cross-cultural contacts were not only divergent but often incongruent. A fact that held significant ramifications for the region’s Indigenous population as the Puritans sought to make their religio-historical vision a reality.

In 1629 the seal of the newly chartered Massachusetts Bay Colony featured a Euro-American interpretation of an Indian man standing mostly naked in front of an emptied landscape with a bow in one hand and a downward facing arrow in the other. The words above

²³⁸ Ibid., 283.

the character read “come over and help us.” The sigil was the embodiment of a racialized dogma that cast Indigenous peoples as ahistorical, warlike, uncivilized, and undeserving of the Eden they inhabited. The mission of those who traveled to the colony was clear. The settlers were to cloth the Indian dressing him in the superiority of English cultural practices. The newcomers were to tame the native’s brutish and hostile nature by getting him to put down his bow and arrow. And finally, the colonists were to impregnate this barren land with the seeds of prosperity. How the newcomers interpreted and sought to realize their divine mission informed the way they perceived interactions with Indigenous peoples. For many of the colonists, longstanding prejudices and the fact that many Natives—including the Narragansetts—failed to supplant their lifeways for that of the English appeared to affirm the supposed retrogressive, bellicose, and uncivilized nature of Indigenous peoples. Thus, Indians were viewed primarily as an obstacle to the realization of the region's real potential and ordained purpose. But, if the seal is observed from a different perspective—one that places the political and diplomatic realities of the region into sharper focus—then the imagery of the sigil takes on a much different and perhaps more accurate meaning. Instead of being barely clothed the man depicted in the seal is dressed for combat with his instruments of war in his hands. The arrow points not just to the location where the battle will be fought, but it also makes clear what is at stake in the contest, the very land upon which the Indian stands. Lastly, the appeal made by the character is an attempt to recruit allies for the coming struggle. When the sigil is viewed with these subtexts in mind, the mission of the settlers appears to take on a wholly different connotation. No longer were the colonists the supposed redeemers of the Indians. Instead, the newcomers who settled in the region were collaborators in a struggle waged between Native peoples as they attempted to reorder their world in the midst of massive social, political, cultural, and economic upheaval.

Chapter 3 - The Summer Sun

It was in the aftermath of what chroniclers termed “King Phillip’s War” that the Narragansetts seemed to vanish as colonial authorities and their Indigenous allies aggressively perused the remnants of this once mighty tribe. Emboldened by their success, colonists hunted down many of the Indians who failed to expire on the battlefield and sold others as slaves to traders in the Caribbean, greatly depleting the region's Native population.²³⁹ The shift in demographics was especially dramatic for the Narragansetts because the tribe was reduced to just a few hundred survivors from a prewar population that numbered somewhere around ten thousand.²⁴⁰ For the colonists, victory forever reordered the dynamics of power in southern New England, solidifying not only the land claims of the settlers but also the ascendancy of their Eurocentric worldview as the perspectives, interpretations, and historical explanations of the English achieved supremacy. For the Natives, defeat meant not only dispossession but also redefinition, as survivors were challenged with reforming and reinterpreting their communities. But while the Narragansett endeavored to reconstitute, reimage, and reassert their collective identity, their non-Indigenous neighbors also sought to redefine the parameters of indigeneity. This chapter traces how the Narragansetts reinterpreted and reaffirmed their community in the years, decades, and centuries following King Phillips War. The chapter also explores the discrepancies between the way Indians and non-Indians attempted to define Indigeneity.

²³⁹ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 138–39.

²⁴⁰ Eric B. Schultz and Michael J. Tougas, *King Philip’s War: The History and Legacy of America’s Forgotten Conflict* (Woodstock: The Countryman Press, 1999), 11. In 1675, the Narragansetts could muster as many as four thousand warriors. Thus, a conservative estimate places the total population at about ten thousand.

Officially, the Narragansetts were bystanders in the conflict that originally erupted between the Wampanoags and Plymouth. As described in chapter two, the Pilgrims and their Indigenous host held different interpretations about the responsibilities and obligations associated with their compact. “It is startling to see how quickly two peoples,” write Shultz and Tougias, “having lived side by side for half a century, could become consumed so quickly and completely with an intense hatred for one another.”²⁴¹ But the transformation was not as sudden as the authors suggest because—as previously stated—the aversions many non-Natives held toward the region’s Indigenous population were enduring. The historian Virginia DeJohn Anderson explains that when the Wampanoag leader realized that English settlers valued their economic and territorial pursuits “more than good relations with his people . . . Philip resorted to violence.”²⁴² Undermanned and outgunned, Metacom appealed to other Indigenous polities for assistance. But many of the Narragansetts considered the outbreak of hostilities a localized affair. In fact, a group of the Indians questioned Roger Williams as to why Massachusetts and Rhode Island had “left not Philip and Plymouth to fight it out.”²⁴³ But the English could not simply dismiss Metacom’s turn to violence as a limited and local issue because the bellicosity of the Wampanoags and their Indigenous supporters only seemed to substantiate and heighten the fears that had long gripped colonial settlements throughout southern New England. Roger Williams explains, “How often I have heard both the English and Dutch say, ‘These Heathen Dogges, better kill a thousand of them then that we Christians should be indangered or troubled by them.’

²⁴¹ Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip’s War*, 2.

²⁴² Virginia DeJohn Anderson, “King Philip’s Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 51, No. 4 (October 1994): 602.

²⁴³ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 119.

”²⁴⁴ Informed by such disquiet, immigrant communities—who had once feuded with each other—now coalesced into a racialized alliance informed by the longstanding dogmas that settlers employed to differentiate themselves from the area's Native population.²⁴⁵ Within this context, few colonists believed that the region's most substantial Indigenous power would remain impartial in a struggle that pitted a pan-Indian force against the European settlers. Indeed, some early chroniclers referred to the conflict as the “Narragansett War,” even though the tribe had declared its neutrality and worked to assuage the fears of Puritan leaders by attempting to meet their wartime demands.²⁴⁶ But, to truly subdue the region's Indigenous population—thereby securing their existence—the colonists knew they needed to bring the Narragansetts to heel.

When the United Colonies marched into southern Rhode Island to subdue the Narragansetts, they did so under the pretext that the tribe had violated the terms of neutrality. On July 15, 1675, English soldiers secured an agreement in which “they forced four low-ranking sachems to sign a treaty,” acting as representatives of the entire tribe.²⁴⁷ In the pact, the minor chiefs supposedly promised that the Narragansetts would not provide shelter to Wampanoag refugees. A few months later Plymouth declared war on the Narragansetts, claiming that the tribe was “relieving and securing Wampanoag women and children and wounded men.”²⁴⁸ The accusation was most likely true considering the permeability of tribal affiliations and the fact that the Narragansetts had previously harbored Pequot refugees. But the English were aware of these

²⁴⁴ Silverman, *Red Brethren* (New York, Cornell University Press, 2010), 21.

²⁴⁵ Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 118. Plymouth even enslaved more than two hundred noncombatants who had turned themselves into colonial leaders.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

²⁴⁷ William S. Simmions, *The Narragansett* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 47.

²⁴⁸ Robert A. Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island: Keepers of the Bay* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 42.

earlier precedents and familiar with the traditional practices that informed the political and diplomatic decisions of Native peoples. Thus, the colonists probably understood that "reliving and securing" women and children was neither an act of aggression nor a pledge of support to Metacom's uprising.²⁴⁹ The real impetuses for the attack on the fort—which erased all ambiguities about the neutrality of the Narragansetts, pretended or not—were the deep-seated trepidations and enmities that shaped the way many colonists viewed the tribe. The contemporary writer William Harris argued that the Narragansett's claims of neutrality were but "pretenses of peace" done "all in deceit."²⁵⁰ But more than just fear and loathing, the defeat of the Narragansetts portended to open up territory long coveted by English settlers. In fact, to ready his men for the coming battle, the Massachusetts governor promised, "If they played the man, took the fort, and drove the enemy out of the Narragansett country, which is their great seat, they should have a gratuity of land, besides their wages."²⁵¹ It is clear then that the soldiers who marched deep into Narragansett country on December 19, 1675, had more in mind than just the failure of the Indians to turn over Wampanoag women and children. The ensuing battle—which took place in a marsh—is commonly referred to in the literature as the Great Swamp Fight. However, according to Narragansett oral tradition, the "fort" was a refugee camp in which women, children, and elderly men sought respite from the ravages of war.²⁵² Within this context, some Narragansetts argue that the conflict is more aptly named the Great Swamp Massacre.

²⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that all of the Narragansetts remained neutral because some of the Indians supported the rebellion and fought alongside Metacom's men. But officially, until the attack on the Narragansett fort, the tribe declared its neutrality and even delivered the heads of Wampanoag fighters to colonial authorities. See Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 246.

²⁵⁰ Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip's War*, 249.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵² Robert Rose, *Our Neighbors the Narragansett*, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7HjILcPEow&t=2073s>.

Whatever the designation, the clash proved decisive because the rout forever changed the political, cultural, social, economic, and demographic landscape of southern New England. With the Narragansetts left reeling and Metacom unable to secure the support of the Mohawk, the uprising was crushed, and many Indians throughout the region—even the noncombatants—were hunted down or sold into slavery.²⁵³ The “colonists had shattered Indian power in the region,” writes Silverman, “by wiping out some 70 percent of the people who had warred against them.”²⁵⁴ Hence, after 1676, there were no more *great trees* in southern New England.

King Philip’s War marked a watershed in which the colonists dramatically asserted their dominion over the land and peoples of southern New England. Due to the totality of the English victory and the upheavals experienced by Indigenous communities after the war, chroniclers have often imagined the possibilities of different outcomes. “Looking back at these events of more than three centuries ago,” writes Simmons, “We can only ask whether there could have been a different ending.”²⁵⁵ Such counterfactual postulations often envision an alternative reality in which the region’s Indigenous peoples coalesce to thwart the settlement and advance of English colonists.²⁵⁶ But at the time, a pan-Indian alliance would have been just as unimaginable to Native peoples as a compact with the French would have been unthinkable to many English. Silverman explains that in the mid-seventeenth century, the Narragansetts “cannot be said to have thought racially at all.”²⁵⁷ Hence, the racial binary that permeated the worldviews of the colonists and their posterity had not yet informed the diplomatic and political decisions of many

²⁵³ Geake, *History of the Narragansett*, 58.

²⁵⁴ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 23.

²⁵⁵ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 51.

²⁵⁶ See: Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 39. Cave, *The Pequot War*, 167. Ethel Boissevain, “The Detribalization of the Narragansett Indians: A Case Study,” *Journal of Ethnohistory* (1956): 23.

²⁵⁷ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 6.

Native peoples. Still, it is not too hard to imagine that Massasoit might have pursued a different course with the Pilgrims had he known that his grandson would be sold to a Caribbean slaver and the head of his son would sit atop a pike in Plymouth for more than twenty years.²⁵⁸ In the aftermath of the war, those Indians who did escape both death and slavery were left to—once again—stitch themselves back together. But now, when the remnants of the region’s once powerful tribes attempted to reform their communities, they did so within a social reality in which non-Indigenous peoples also claimed the right—by virtue of their victory—to determine the parameters of indigeneity. And as the colonists achieved supremacy, so too did their conceptualizations about race and ethnicity.

The collapse, merger, and reconstitution of Indigenous communities intensified in the decades following King Phillip’s War as Native peoples in southern New England faced the challenges and demands associated with English colonialism. With the remaking of the region’s demographic, social, political, and physical landscapes, Indians sought to strengthen the bonds within their communities and to bolster and reinterpret ties with other Indigenous groups. For example, Fisher and Silverman explain that before 1676, the English sometimes differentiated between the Niantics and the Narragansetts as two distinct and separate groups, but “after the war they became known solely as Narragansetts.”²⁵⁹ Similarly, Simmons writes, “In the years after the war, a few surviving Narragansett and other New England Indians merged with the Niantic,” thus forming a new group referred to as the Narragansetts.²⁶⁰ Although the Narragansetts and the Niantics had a long and close association, sometime shortly after 1676, the two tribes along with other Native peoples in the region coalesced into one—almost

²⁵⁸ Schultz and Tougias, *King Philip’s War*, 5.

²⁵⁹ Fisher and Silverman, *Ningret*, 139.

²⁶⁰ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 53.

indistinguishable—group. As described in the first chapter, the process of ethnogenesis was a social and political reality for Indigenous peoples throughout southern New England long before the arrival of Europeans. The historian Linford D. Fisher observes that: “Tribal boundaries were often overlapping . . . and could be amended, altered, or even obliterated by cultural processes such as adoption, intermarriage, alliance-building, and the ritual submission of defeated enemies.”²⁶¹ The benefits accrued by those Indigenous communities that did join together were clearly communicated by Fisher when he asserted that: “By pooling agricultural, trade, and spiritual resources, communities were redefined, strengthened, and better able to respond to the most devastating consequences of colonialism.”²⁶² Indeed, the merger of Indigenous polities after the war can be understood not only as the continuation of a diplomatic tradition that preceded colonial settlement but also as a strategic and political exercise. However they reconfigured themselves, Natives continued to assert and celebrate their distinctiveness as Indigenous peoples even after the devastation and dislocation they experienced. Over the next century, the Narragansetts continued to reimagine and reassert themselves, as they navigated and helped to fashion evolving economic, political, social, and religious conditions throughout the region.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Linford D. Fisher, “Religion, Race, and the Formation of Pan-Indian Identities in the Brothertown Movement, 1700-1800,” in *Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas*, ed. Gregory D. Smithers and Brooke N. Newman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 153.

²⁶² Fisher and Silverman, *Ninigret*, 154.

²⁶³ Since at least 1723 the sachems of the Narragansetts lived and behaved more like English gentry than their fellow tribesmen who mostly survived off the tribe's diminishing landholdings or worked as servants and slaves. Due to the massive debts incurred by the Ninigret dynasty, especially those accumulated by Thomas Ninigret (King Tom), a faction of Narragansetts led by the Reverend Samuel Niles petitioned the Rhode Island legislature in 1769 to abolish the role of sachem and replace it with a tribal council. See: Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 56.

The victory provided the newcomers with a greater sense of security as many of their Indigenous rivals either perished in battle, fled the area, or were forcibly removed from the region. Therefore, after the war, many colonists “no longer feared local Indians as bloodthirsty savages” with the potential and temperament to threaten English settlements.²⁶⁴ The newcomers instead reinterpreted the Native peoples who remained in southern New England. No longer viewed as a menace, some colonists now saw Indians as the fatally flawed victims of their own immutable nature. The assertion that Indians were “suited to degradation within colonial society” because “they were incapable of civility” became for many a self-fulfilling prophecy as the political, social, and economic influence of the Narragansetts waned in the years following King Philip’s War.²⁶⁵ For example, in 1707, inspired in part by the belief that non-Indians could make better use of the territory, the Rhode Island General Assembly commissioned a survey of all the “vacant lands in the Narragansett country.”²⁶⁶ The following year colonial leaders questioned the Narragansett sachem Ninigret II about these “vacant” lands inquiring “what may be a sufficient competency of land for him and for his men to live upon?”²⁶⁷ When the sachem later quitclaimed four-fifths of the tribe’s land to the colony in 1709 relinquishing ancestral rights to the territory, the move was widely interpreted as part of a natural progression in which Native peoples yielded to the superiority of settler society. When viewed from this perspective, the dispossession of the Indians appears inevitable because the Narragansetts were supposedly innately ill-equipped to adapt to postwar realities.²⁶⁸ However, the decision of the tribe to abandon its claim to what had

²⁶⁴ David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 24.

²⁶⁵ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 24.

²⁶⁶ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 53-4.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.,

²⁶⁸ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 26.

been ancestral lands was emblematic of emerging social, political, economic, and demographic conditions and not a tacit capitulation by the Indians. In reality, the Narragansetts could no longer enforce their territorial boundaries and non-Indians regularly encroached upon their land.²⁶⁹ Thus, the quitclaim can be more appropriately understood as a strategic move informed by traditional diplomatic practices. It is likely that the Narragansetts hoped that by gifting the land to the settlers the colonial government would be obligated to help the tribe maintain the territorial integrity of the one-fifth that remained in their possession. The intention of tribal members to retain and preserve some form of autonomy in the circumscribed area can be understood by examining the land the Indians sought to maintain. Within the boundaries of the area that the Narragansetts continued to claim were located natural springs, freshwater ponds, parcels of dense forest and swamplands, tidewater areas, and a significant stretch of the region's coastline. Thus, the acreage the Indians reserved for themselves allowed access to traditional forms of sustenance including the waters harboring the hard shell clams the Narragansetts referred to as quahogs. Because of the tribe's diminished population, it is conceivable that those Indians who remained in the area could have sustained a fairly traditional lifestyle within the sixty-four-mile expanse, and this might have been the motive of the quitclaim.²⁷⁰

However, it appears that the Indians had learned from the failings and inconsistencies of previous cross-cultural agreements and instead of defining the quitclaim through acts that engendered familiarity and reciprocity, the Narragansetts now specified what they expected to gain in the arrangement. For example, when Ninigret II negotiated with colonial leaders, he declared: "I reserve . . . lands where I now dwell . . . all which within said bounds, I reserve to

²⁶⁹ Ibid.,

²⁷⁰ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 54.

myself and my heirs forever.”²⁷¹ The implications of the sachem’s pronouncement were clear. If colonial leaders accepted Ninigret’s offer, they also agreed to all of the terms and obligations therein. When the land deed is viewed within this context, what many thought was a windfall for Rhode Island’s settlers was really a transaction in which the Narragansetts secured—in principle—the assurance and protection of colonial leaders “forever.” But the Natives were not the only ones who learned from previous cross-culture exchanges because it was in these earlier agreements that the newcomers realized the utility of their treaties. Any violation of the terms of an agreement—however inconsequential or ordinary—could be used as a pretext to invalidate the compact and release the colonists from any obligations. Therefore, the stipulation in the quitclaim which stated that if the Narragansetts sold any land without the consent of Rhode Island’s colonial authorities “all that is so disposed shall be forfeited to the Governor and Company,” was both a safeguard and a release clause.²⁷²

In the early eighteenth-century, the lines of demarcation between colonies were fluid and evolving. In fact, the 1707 land survey was not only inspired by notions of Native inferiority, but it was also precipitated by a land dispute between Rhode Island and Connecticut.²⁷³ Hence, it is likely that Rhode Island’s colonial leadership sought the inclusion of the provision forbidding

²⁷¹ “The Narragansett Indians Supreme Court Opinion 1898,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed October 21, 2016.

[file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20(1).pdf)

²⁷² “The Narragansett Indians Supreme Court Opinion 1898,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed October 21, 2016,

[file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20(1).pdf).

²⁷³ Ibid.,

any sale of land by the Indians without the colony's consent as a means by which to maintain some authority over the Indians and their territory. But more than just control, the agreement offered Rhode Islanders justification for future claims. "It was the anticipation of Indian disappearance," writes Silverman, "that made reservations palatable for land-hungry Englishmen."²⁷⁴ Indeed, as early as 1713, the Narragansetts petitioned colonial leaders for assistance in dealing with aggressive settlers and land speculators. In 1717 Rhode Island placed the remaining tribal lands in trust as a means by which to better regulate and even slow the rate of dispossession.²⁷⁵ But the Indians who appealed to the state not only sought reprieve from opportunistic whites, because they also wanted to circumscribe the authority of sachems that seemed to be disposing of communal land for personal gain.

Throughout most of the eighteenth-century Narragansett sachems occupied an almost impossible role. Not only were the tribal leaders tasked with representing and advocating for their community, but the sachems were expected to do so while observing and adhering to the traditional ideals of monocratic rule maintained by many of the newcomers. Europeans often framed their rulers as autocrats with great authority and dominion over those within their preview. In fact, it was this "absolute despotism" that so enraged the colonists in North America and contributed to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1776.²⁷⁶ Conversely, as shown earlier, reciprocity and consensus informed traditional Indigenous ideals of leadership and social allegiance. While discussing the power held by Narragansett sachems, Roger Williams observed that leaders avoided making laws or wars "unto which the people are averse, and by gentle

²⁷⁴ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 26.

²⁷⁵ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 54.

²⁷⁶ The signatories to the Declaration of Independence accused the King of Great Brittan of establishing an "absolute Tyranny of these States." And argued that the people retained the right to alter or abolish such a government. See: The Declaration of Independence. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

perswasion [sic] cannot be brought.”²⁷⁷ Similarly, Daniel Gookin explained that leaders who failed to act “obligingly and lovingly unto their people” risked losing the allegiance of followers.²⁷⁸

However, settlers often expected Indigenous leaders to speak and act as sovereigns vesting them with tremendous power over a tribe’s economic resources. For example, throughout the eighteenth-century, the Rhode Island legislature recognized the sachem as the sole arbiter and beneficiary of “the lease, rent, and sale of tribal land to whites.”²⁷⁹ This prescribed authority along with an expectation that Indian leaders assume the trappings and lifestyles of English nobility encouraged some Narragansett sachems to use land sales to finance newly acquired lifeways. An account produced in 1744 by Dr. Alexander Hamilton described the estate of George Ninigret—youngest son of Ninigret II.

He possesses twenty or thirty 1000 acres of very fine level land round this house, upon which he has many tenants and has, of his own, a good stock of horses and other cattle. This King lives after the English mode . . . His queen goes in a high modish dress in her silks, hoops, stays, and dresses like an English woman. He educates his children to the belles letters and is himself a very complaisant mannerly man. We pay’d [sic] him a visit and he treated us with a glass of good wine.²⁸⁰

As Hamilton observed, George Ninigret aimed to have his children educated “after the English mode,” in fact his youngest son Thomas was later sent to England for schooling. George’s horses and cattle, his wife’s silks and hoops, and Thomas’ education were all financed by local whites who readily accepted land or the proceeds from land sales as payment for the debts incurred by the sachems. Hence when Thomas Ninigret returned from Europe accustomed to the finery of the

²⁷⁷ Williams, *A Key*, 142.

²⁷⁸ Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 147.

²⁷⁹ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 55.

²⁸⁰ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 56-7.

English gentry and assumed the sachemship, he began a reign that one historian called “the most costly and divisive in the history of the Ninigret family.”²⁸¹ Due in large to the massive debts incurred by Thomas and his forbearers, nearly all of the 41,000 acres Ninigret II claimed in 1709 had been lost by mid-century.

Chroniclers have tended to judge the Ninigret dynasty harshly. For example, the scholar Joseph A. Conforti, observes that when “The Ninigret family . . . gained legal control over thousands of acres of tribal land. They used it not on behalf of fellow reservation Natives, but to finance a lavish Anglicized way of life.”²⁸² Similarly, William S. Simmons writes that “As ‘King Tom’ [Thomas Ninigret] matured, his standard of living and his debts became legendary.”²⁸³ And while recounting the abuses of Ninigret II, Robert A. Geake referred to the sachem as an arrogant and entitled “degenerate.”²⁸⁴ However, it is important to remember that many of the sources detailing and sometimes deriding the opulence of the Ninigrets were produced and preserved by white colonists who were often interested in gaining greater access to the lands held by the sachems. Hence, it is not difficult to recognize how these accounts could be used to both explain and justify the dispossession of the Narragansetts. The stories of excess bolstered a well-established maxim that portrayed Indigenous peoples as hopelessly irredeemable. The exploits recounted in these sources implied that even when afforded the advantages of wealth, Indians were still innately ill-equipped to adapt to emerging social, political, cultural, and economic realities.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 59.

²⁸² Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 151.

²⁸³ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 59.

²⁸⁴ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 56.

However, it seems that the problem for Thomas Ninigret was not his inability to adapt to European lifeways but perhaps that the sachem accommodated and assimilated too much. The hunting, farming, and crafting associated with a subsistence lifestyle was still practiced in varying degrees by many Narragansetts when Thomas returned from England sometime around the middle of the eighteenth-century. But for an individual raised and educated mostly within western society, the lifeways of some of his fellow tribesmen must have seemed anachronistic to the young sachem, and Thomas drew upon his wealth to maintain the lifestyle to which he had grown accustomed. As the tribe's principal representative and advocate, it might have even been appropriate for the sachem to live "after the English mode" in order to prove that the Indians could indeed adapt and assimilate into modern society. Whatever it was that informed the decisions and lifestyle of Thomas Ninigret, it is clear that under his reign the tribe's landholdings were greatly diminished making the traditional means of subsistence almost impossible.²⁸⁵

No longer able to use the land to meet the bulk of their needs, by the middle of the eighteenth-century many Narragansetts became "poor rural folk who struggled to make a living around the edges of the white plantation economy."²⁸⁶ While some of the Indians turned to selling venison, furs, feathers, baskets, and woven mats, others searched for employment beyond the confines of the reservation.²⁸⁷ Women tended to find jobs locally working in the homes of their white neighbors. However, the employment opportunities available to many men—laborers, soldiers, and sailors—required that they leave their families and communities for months or

²⁸⁵ Sliverman, *Red Brethren*, 26.

²⁸⁶ Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 56.

²⁸⁷ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 26.

years at a time.²⁸⁸ The result was that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries many Narragansett households were led by women, a reality that contributed to greater instances of intermarriage. Still, many of the Narragansetts who remained in southern Rhode Island struggled to provide for themselves and their families. “Some Indians signed indenture contracts,” writes Silverman, “as the only way to feed and clothe their children.”²⁸⁹ Moreover, Silverman explains that exorbitant fees, disproportionately high fines, and frivolous lawsuits often forced other Narragansetts into bondage. The realities of dispossession, poverty, and servitude were seen by non-Indians as evidence of maladjustment and helped not only to reinforce the belief that Indian peoples were incapable of integrating into modern society but also justified their placement at the bottom region’s social hierarchy. It was, in fact, these hardships that finally began “to open the hearts and minds of many Native peoples to Christianity.”²⁹⁰

The sachemship of Thomas Ninigret coincided with a general religious revivalism that challenged traditional hierarchies and advocated for the democratization of spiritual authority. This Great Awakening—as it has come to be known—held tremendous significance for the Narragansetts because it helped to inspire and empower individual tribal members who used the rhetoric of equality to openly challenge the sachem’s authority. The animated evangelicals of the Great Awakening—known as New Lights—“preached against the corruptions of worldly wealth and emphasized the equality of all men and women before God.”²⁹¹ Embracing these doctrinal dictates, some tribal members started attending services at a church established in Westerly

²⁸⁸ Craig N. Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 4.

²⁸⁹ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 26.

²⁹⁰ Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown*, 4.

²⁹¹ Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform And The Religious Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13.

Rhode Island by Reverend Joseph Park.²⁹² By 1744, more than one hundred Narragansetts joined Park's congregation with sixty-four of the Indians becoming full members including Samuel Niles—a former Narragansett powwow [traditional spiritual leader] turned New Light convert. Niles could not have been more different than Park. While the Reverend received his training and credentials from Harvard, the Narragansett leader was illiterate—but had committed many verses to memory—and although Park was himself an evangelical, Niles was chastised for “exhorting in the congregation” too exuberantly.²⁹³

Eventually, Niles led a faction of Narragansetts that detached from Park's flock and established a new church on reservation land. But these Indian separatists did not only reject the leadership in the church because the new congregation also formed the foundation from which tribal members could contest the authority of the sachem. It was in this way that the Indians appropriated the prevailing religious tenets and “converted Christianity to their own needs.”²⁹⁴ The challenge mounted by Niles and his followers ultimately resulted in the revocation of the sachem's authority to unilaterally sell tribal land. However, the struggle had been a protracted one, and by the time the legislation establishing a review board passed in 1782, the damage was already done because much of territory forever promised to the Indians 1709 was already in the possession of local whites.²⁹⁵

Faced with the loss of almost all of their ancestral lands, some of the newly converted Narragansetts concluded that “they would be more free from the contaminating influence, and evil example . . . of their white brethren” if they left the region and resettled in “a sanctuary far

²⁹² Simmons, *The Narragansett*, 57.

²⁹³ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 80.

²⁹⁴ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 48.

²⁹⁵ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 86.

away from whites where they and their offspring could finally live in peace and prosperity.”²⁹⁶ In what has come to be known as the Brothertown movement, various individuals from Indigenous communities throughout southern New England sought not only liturgical autonomy from their non-Indian neighbors, but also social, cultural, territorial, and even racial separation. This amalgamation of tribes—now known as the Brothertown Indians—first moved to territory granted to the group by the Oneida of western New York in 1770s.²⁹⁷ Later, due to the continued expansion of the non-Indigenous populace, the Brothertown Indians faced renewed territorial, social, and economic pressures. Once again the Indians fled west, this time to territory controlled by the Winnebago in what is now known as Brothertown, Wisconsin.²⁹⁸ Historian Linford Fisher explains that at its base the “motivation for migration seems to have been long-term resentment and frustration.”²⁹⁹ Hence, the Brothertown movement was not just emblematic of the abject social, political, and economic conditions that faced the Narragansetts in Rhode Island, but it was also indicative of how the process of ethnogenesis was strategic. Archaeologist Craig N. Cipolla argues that “reeling from the aftermaths of colonial encroachment . . . once-distinct Indigenous groups . . . sometimes reinvented themselves” creating “new identities and modes of social classification as they incorporated once-foreign ideas, materials, and practices and responded to colonial power structures.”³⁰⁰ Indeed, as the Indigenous peoples of southern New England searched for ways to navigate the pressures of colonization, the Indians found that they often

²⁹⁶ Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 2-3.

²⁹⁷ Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown*, 40.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹⁹ Linford D. Fisher, “Religion, Race, and the Formation of Pan-Indian Identities in the Brothertown Movement, 1700-1800,” in *Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas*, ed. Gregory D. Smithers and Brooke N. Newman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 168.

³⁰⁰ Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown*, 25.

faced the same challenges as other Native groups throughout the region. As Silverman observes, the Brothertown movement emerged out of this shared experience because it was not just the Narragansetts—but all Indians—who had been assigned to the lowest caste in New England. Still, the frustration and resentment to which Fisher referred must have been especially acute in Rhode Island because Narragansetts comprised the majority of those Indians who left for Albany. In all, the movement claimed close to twenty percent of the tribe’s overall population.³⁰¹ In 1855 the Narragansett-Brothertown composer Thomas Commuck gave a sobering account of his Brothertown experience:

Here, then, are the Brothertown Indians on the east side of Winnebago Lake, in Calumet County, trying to imitate our white brethren in all things except their vices. Here we have taken our last stand, as it were, and are resolved to meet manfully, that overwhelming tide of fate, which seems destined, in a few short years, to sweep the Red Man from the face of existence.

For Commuck’s tribal brethren who remained in their homeland, the few short years to which the author referred were, in fact, twenty-five because in 1880 the state of Rhode Island declared that the Narragansetts were extinct.

Belying its relatively small size as both a colony and a state, Rhode Island played a central role in the trade that brought African slaves to American shores. The historian Christy Clark-Pujara explains, “During the colonial period, the West Indian and Atlantic slave trades were the lifeblood of the colony’s [Rhode Island] economy.”³⁰² Local merchants transported more than sixty percent of all enslaved persons destined for North America. “And by 1750 Rhode Islanders held the highest proportion of slaves in New England” with one in ten residents

³⁰¹ Ibid., 40.

³⁰² Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* Kindle Edition (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 144.

being an enslaved person.³⁰³ Slavery and all of its economic outgrowths—what Clark-Pujara terms the business of slavery—was central to the development and prosperity of Rhode Island as both a colony and a state. And as such, the assertion of a racial hierarchy undergirded local socioeconomic realities. “To put it bluntly,” writes Clark-Pujara, “the lives and the worth of many white Rhode Islanders were predicated on the subordination of black people.”³⁰⁴ But, as we have seen, individuals of African descent were not the only ones relegated to the lowest rungs of society and thus eligible for enslavement because even Roger Williams profited from the sale of his former Indigenous benefactors.³⁰⁵ As identified earlier, in the years following King Philip’s War, dispossession forced many Narragansett into servitude.³⁰⁶ By 1703, Rhode Islanders codified slavery and limited the practice to include only African and Indigenous persons.³⁰⁷ But unlike their Native counterparts who could, at times, draw upon existing Indigenous networks—however small and fragile—for support, refuge, strength, and sustenance, the Africans who labored in homes, mills, distilleries, and on small farms throughout Rhode Island did so in almost complete isolation from others of African descent because “most northern enslavers held just one or two slaves.”³⁰⁸ However, the maintenance and perpetuation of a racial hierarchy meant that both Africans and Natives were legally separated from whites as “people of

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Fisher and Silverman, *Ningret*, 139.

³⁰⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, “The Racial Vernacular: Contesting the Black/White Binary in *Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island*” in *Race, Nation, & Empire in American History*, ed. James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, & Robert G. Lee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 23.

³⁰⁷ Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 272.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 183.

color” and, as such, often segregated into “the same taverns, jobs, and city neighborhoods.”³⁰⁹ Moreover, as enslaved persons, “Africans and Indians in Rhode Island labored side by side.”³¹⁰ Such social and physical proximity inevitably led to intimacies and intermarriages between Africans and Indians.

Native peoples have long used intermarriage to incorporate nonmembers into existing social, political, and cultural frameworks. For the Narragansetts, unions between Indians and Africans helped to bolster the tribe’s depleted population and were a means to bring “new skills, social and political connections, and other forms of power into the community.”³¹¹ As noted, the demands for Indigenous men to prosecute colonial wars and to serve as crew for far-flung excursions meant that even before the outbreak of the American Revolution, Indian women outnumbered Indian men in Rhode Island by a ratio of almost two to one.³¹² Faced with this demographic reality, Daniel Mandell argues that “Indian women in seaport neighborhoods and rural villages often had little choice but to marry someone of African ancestry.”³¹³ For some Narragansetts, coupling with a Black man was a strategic decision because it was through these unions that women gained access to the labor they could use “to improve their lives and better provide for their children.”³¹⁴ For example, William Brown recounted that sometime around 1770 his grandmother purchased and married an enslaved man “in order to change her mode of

³⁰⁹ Daniel R. Mandell, “Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Intermarriage in Southern New England, 1760–1880.” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 466–501. doi:10.2307/2567748.

³¹⁰ Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 20

³¹¹ Mandel, “Shifting Boundaries,” 469.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 470.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

living” because the union portended to enable her to live “after the manner of white people.”³¹⁵ For Black men, these unions also connoted an opportunity to improve one’s station in life. By marrying into the tribe, peoples of African descent not only gained access to reservation land—or what remained thereof, but they also ensured that their descendants would be born-free persons. But these interracial unions were not always primarily strategic calculations because in 1761, Thomas Ninigret married Mary Whitfield, a “molatto.”³¹⁶ As sachem, Ningret would have had little economic motivation to marry Whitfield and was most likely merely smitten. As evidenced by Thomas Ninigret and William Brown’s grandmother, various demographic, social, and economic factors influenced intermarriage, and as such, unions between Africans and Indians were not unlike previous acts of ethnogenesis.

The rhetoric of freedom and equality espoused in the years leading up to the American Revolution inspired New England communities to enact legislation hastening emancipation throughout the region.³¹⁷ In Rhode Island, ideology combined with necessity in 1778 when—in an effort to counteract the British, who occupied the town of Newport and offered freedom to any slaves held by rebels—legislators passed a law providing that “every able bodied Negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave who enlisted for the war’s duration and passed muster, would be freed.”³¹⁸ The offer led to the creation of Rhode Island’s famous all-black regiment and some 250 slaves joined the America effort.³¹⁹ Moreover, state officials passed a gradual emancipation act

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Kindle Edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), Location 183.

³¹⁸ Udit L. Van Burkirk “Claiming Their Due: African Americans in the Revolutionary War and Its Aftermath” in *War and Society*, ed. (City: Publisher, Date), Page

³¹⁹ Ibid. 134

in 1784 that further contributed to the demise of slavery in Rhode Island. But by 1820, as Melish argues, the discourse surrounding slavery was “transformed into the discourse of ‘Race’ as many whites promoted a mythologized view of a “free New England.”³²⁰

Melish explains that for many Euro-Americans, the concept of a free New England connoted not just a region absent of slavery but the restoration of an apocryphal “homogeneous [all] white society.”³²¹ However, the continued presence of the former slaves could not be easily explained in the newly sterilized historical narratives which minimized the importance and prevalence of slavery. Therefore, while New Englanders sought to reinterpret their past, they also endeavored to recast freed people in the region as anomalies. Within this context, peoples of African descent were interpreted as “strangers” whose deprived condition was seen as indicative of their natural inferiority and not an outgrowth of systemic practices.³²² This mythologized past, coupled with the economic hardships of the postwar era, worked to harden social demarcations and “further ‘racialized’ both black and white identity in New England.”³²³ When Euro-Americans sought to define and explain their position atop the social hierarchy, they turned to new “scientific” explanations of difference as innate, permanent, and residing in the body.³²⁴ Thus, Euro-Americans ascribed their imagined superiority and the perceived inferiority of African-Americans to nature.

Unwelcome in the “all-white” society envisioned by Euro-Americans, as more people of African descent gained their freedom many “went native,” living in Charlestown on tribal land

³²⁰Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, Kindle Location 183.

³²¹ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, Kindle Location 4128.

³²² Ibid., Location 222.

³²³ Ibid., Locations 224-225.

³²⁴ Ibid., Locations 198-199

“after the manner of the Indians.”³²⁵ Melish observes that although—in time—these migrants identified socially as Indian, many in the dominant society continued to see anyone of African descent—regardless of admixture—as innately inferior mongrels.³²⁶ Mandell posits that “although the efforts by southern New England Indians to survive by incorporating blacks worked, that very success posed new threats.”³²⁷ Questions about racial authenticity constituted the heart of the challenges now faced by those Indians—mixed or not—who continued to claim Narragansett lineage. But race was not yet a primary consideration among the Narragansetts as they endeavored to reconstitute and redefine their community during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Hence, absorbing peoples of African descent into the tribe was not unlike incorporating Pequot and Wampanoag refugees a hundred years earlier. But a lot had transpired over the past century, and although ethnogenesis had long been a traditional practice, the defeat of the Indians at the Great Swamp meant that—at least in the public sphere—the Narragansetts no longer solely determined and defined the parameters of their community. Many Rhode Islanders—motivated by a desire to collapse social differences into a binary of black and white—began to challenge the indigeneity of the Narragansetts.³²⁸ Although it is impossible to know to what extent the intermixing with Africans reshaped tribal practices and customs, the ability of the Indians to transform and evolve to meet new social, political, demographic, and economic challenges was undoubtedly consistent with Indigenous traditions. By intermixing with newcomers—both black and white—the Indians certainly changed their appearance, but appeals to the way tribal members looked—as a way to question their Indianness—had more to do with

³²⁵ Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 23.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Mandell, “Shifting Boundaries,” 469.

³²⁸ Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 29.

erasing the rights and claims of Rhode Island's Indigenous population than the particular hues found among the Narragansetts.

The perception—held by many—that Rhode Island's Indigenous population had simply vanished was no accident. Instead, it was the intended outcome of an effort that endured for more than two centuries as colonial and later state officials attempted to erase all vestiges of the region's once-vibrant Indian population. Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau (Narragansett) argue that between 1750 and 1800, town clerks throughout Rhode Island stopped referring to Indigenous persons as “Indian” and instead substituted the term “*mustee*” and later “Negro” or “black” in a deliberate effort to commit what the authors called “documentary genocide.”³²⁹ According to Herndon and Sekatau, “By writing Indians out of the record, local leaders helped ensure that Native people would not regain land in their towns.”³³⁰ Thus, many local whites held a vested interest in abetting the disappearance of Rhode Island's Indigenous population, if not in reality, then at least on paper where it appeared to matter most.

For more than a century, the “ghosting” of the Narragansetts seemed to be a complete success.³³¹ In fact, even other Indigenous peoples came to believe that the tribe had just disappeared. In 1811, just before going to war against American authorities, the Shawnee leader Tecumseh queried his followers, “Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett . . . and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and

³²⁹ Herndon and Sekatau “The Right to a Name: The Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era,” *Journal of Ethnohistory* (1997): 437.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 453.

³³¹ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 49. Geake introduces the term ‘ghosting’ to explain the intentional marginalization of the Narragansett.

the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.”³³² But the Narragansetts had not vanished because even as Tecumseh spoke, tribal members were locked in a bitter land dispute with state and local authorities.³³³ However, “Given the prevailing attitudes about race and class in the dominant society,” writes Rubertone, “diluted blood meant that Narragansetts were” simply classified as Negroes.³³⁴

As early as 1819, a *Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode-Island*, which professed to be “written with care and impartiality,” claimed that the Narragansetts had “passed away like a dream” and that the “remains of the tribe” were “intermixed” members of an “abject race.”³³⁵ Similarly, a report delivered to the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1831 stated, “The once powerful nation of the Narragansett is found to be rapidly verging toward that state of extinction,” and “only five or six are genuine untainted Narragansett; all the rest are either clear or nearly Negroes.”³³⁶ Moreover, in 1852, 1855, 1858, and 1866, the Rhode Island General Assembly established committees to explore the detribalization of the Narragansetts. And in his report to the General Assembly in 1858, the Rhode Island Indian commissioner told lawmakers that the Narragansetts no longer “looked Indian.”³³⁷

It is clear then that many non-Indians sought to equate Indigeneity and authenticity with the highly subjective gage of appearance. But as Melish observes, conceptualizations about race and identity are “not imposed by one group upon another,” but are instead the products “of an

³³² Cited in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970), 1.

³³³ “General Assembly - Petitions Received, 1725–1890,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed June 28, 2017, <http://sos.ri.gov/archon/?p=collections/controlcard&id=813>.

³³⁴ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 72.

³³⁵ Quoted in Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 29.

³³⁶ Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 22.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

ongoing dialogue between dominated and subordinated peoples.”³³⁸ Similarly, the scholar Harald E. Prins observes that “Ethnicity involves self-ascription,” and that at times Indigenous peoples “intentionally distinguish themselves from others—especially non-Indians.”³³⁹ Thus, in Rhode Island, redefinitions of indigeneity by the white majority did not go unchallenged. For example, in 1831, a group writing as “Members of the Narragansett Tribe of Indians” acknowledged that “Mixture of African and European Blood with that of the native Indians” had taken place and that this reality could “not be undone by any Legislative Act.”³⁴⁰ The Indians appeared to be arguing that their indigeneity could not be revoked because of mixed ancestry or by legal measures. Likewise, in 1866, the Narragansetts made explicit their objections to the way non-Indians characterized and perceived their community.

We are not Negroes: we are the heirs of Ninigret, and of the great chiefs and warriors of the Narragansetts. Because, when your ancestors stole the Negro from Africa, and brought him amongst us, and made a slave of him, we extended to him the hand of friendship, and permitted his blood to be mingled with ours, are we to be called Negroes, and to be told that we may be made Negro citizens? We claim that while one drop of Indian blood remains in our veins, we are entitled to the rights and privileges guaranteed by your ancestors to ours by solemn treaty, which without a breach of faith, you cannot violate . . . We deny your right to take from us that which never came from you.³⁴¹

It seems then that both the Narragansetts and their non-Indian neighbors sought to define Indianness according to a proportionality of blood quantum. The Narragansetts asserted that one drop of Native blood affirmed their indigeneity and conferred all the rights, privileges, and guarantees due to Native peoples, while their white neighbors contended that one drop of African

³³⁸ Ibid., 22.

³³⁹ Harald E. Prins, *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* (United States: Cengage Learning, 2002), 11.

³⁴⁰ Melish, “Racial Vernacular,” 24.

³⁴¹ Quoted in Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 159–60.

blood rendered the Indians illegitimate and undeserving mongrels. In 1879, on the eve of detribalization, Councilman Daniel Sekater challenged the way many Rhode Islanders attempted to define the racial identity of the Narragansetts when he stated “some argue that they [Narragasnetts] ought to come out as citizens because they are mixed up with others . . . But other classes are mixed up with other nations as well. There is hardly one who can say I am a clear-blooded Yankee.”³⁴² However, as Lepore noted, in the aftermath of King Phillip’s War, it was the non-Indians who had won dominion over the public discourse, and as such, it was their interpretations of indigeneity that predominated social and political constructs throughout southern New England.

In 1880, and in accordance with the prevailing interpretation that Rhode Island's Indigenous community no longer existed, state administrators moved to formally detribalize the Narragansetts. Because contemporaries understood "the gravity of the subject under consideration, and the interest at stake," governmental leaders decided to include a brief account of the history of the Narragansetts. The narrative was intended to explain and justify the termination of the tribe's legal identity. Patricia Rubertone explains, “In preparing the historical sketch, the committee made ‘copious extractions’ from a number of nineteenth-century histories.”³⁴³ But, as the author astutely observes, all of the accounts “were unanimous in expressing the opinion that the Narragansetts were an expiring tribe.”³⁴⁴ The historical narratives employed by the state were not only universally ethnocentric, but their treatment of Indigenous history was at best cursory and at worst fraudulent. Such accounts, along with other dubious

³⁴² Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 95.

³⁴³ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 53.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

pieces of evidence, informed the opinions of Rhode Island lawmakers when they claimed that there was “not a person of pure Indian blood in the tribe,” and that “extinction as a tribe has been accomplished as effectively by nature as an Act of the General Assembly will put an end to it in name.”³⁴⁵ Hence, the rhetoric Rhode Island officials chose to embrace was unequivocal in the supposition that the Narragansetts were a dying tribe.

The move to disband the Narragansetts coincided with a nationwide shift in policy toward Indigenous peoples. Historian Frederick Hoxie explains that although Americans once envisioned that Indians and whites could exist in perpetual seclusion, “the political and economic expansion of the postwar [Civil War] era undermined America’s ‘island communities.’”³⁴⁶ In the small settlements of southern Rhode Island, where finite space and limited resources often pitted the state’s white and Indigenous communities against one another, the postwar fervor of expansion and modernization only exacerbated longstanding territorial conflicts. For example, in 1879, at a public hearing held by the Rhode Island State Assembly, Gideon Ammons—head of the Narragansett tribal council—stated the following:

Now it appears the State wants to dispose of our public lands, we don’t wish to stop the wheels of any business . . . [T]he state has accused us of making an enormous expense for them, and here is this tract of land. The railroad passes across it. They have built upon it and don’t call our property anything.³⁴⁷

Gideon’s concern was held by many Narragansetts who believed they had not been adequately compensated when whites encroached on their lands in the name of economic progress.

³⁴⁵ “*Narragansett tribe of Indians: Report of the Committee of Investigation; A Historical Sketch, and Evidence Taken, Made to the House of Representatives, at its January Session, A.D. 1880* (1880),” Rhode Island General Assembly, accessed June 28, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/narragansetttrib00rhod#page/6/mode/2up>.

³⁴⁶ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2, 13.

³⁴⁷ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 24.

As was evident in southern Rhode Island, American expansion brought Indigenous and white communities into closer contact and hastened calls for the total assimilation of Native peoples. Hoxie observes that this effort toward inclusion was indicative of the nation's "final promise" to its Indigenous charges that they could become full and equal members of American society. Although such sentiments no doubt helped to influence many people, few Rhode Islanders sought the meaningful inclusion of the Narragansetts. Many people throughout the region viewed the more than two hundred years of cross-cultural contact between the region's white and Indigenous populations as mostly adversarial. This history, and the negative attitudes it engendered inspired a few local whites to question the wisdom of granting citizenship to the Narragansett. "Some were concerned," writes Ethel Boissevain, "about the prospect of having Indian 'paupers' to support by town taxes, and adding to the taxpayer's burden by having Indian children attend the district schools."³⁴⁸ These suspicions were well placed, given that access to district schools was one of the primary motivators for those Narragansetts who supported detribalization during the late nineteenth century.

Although some local whites maintained their misgivings, for most Rhode Islanders, the potential benefits of Indian inclusion far outweighed any drawbacks because, as Rubertone explains, "Local citizens held a vested interest in the Narragansett's detribalization, and especially in ancestral land that would then be made available to them."³⁴⁹ Indeed, Rhode Islanders seemed to have been less concerned with ensuring the equitable inclusion of Native peoples than with the practical costs and benefits of assimilation. Within this context, the acquisition of Narragansett land and the nullification of tribal territorial claims overshadowed the

³⁴⁸ Ethel Boissevain, "The Detribalization of the Narragansett," 9.

³⁴⁹ Rubertone, *Grave Undertakings*, 55.

fulfillment of any promises of inclusion made to the Indians. As a result, detribalization saw Rhode Island's Indigenous population pushed further to the periphery, where it was expected—perhaps even hoped—that the Indians would just disappear. Accordingly, the last entry in a report issued by the commission established to oversee the process of detribalization appeared almost regretful as it simply stated, "The name of the Narragansett tribe now passes from the statute books."³⁵⁰ Considering that many Rhode Island leaders actively sought the erasure of Native distinctiveness as a means to forestall legal claims, such statements might be read as a positive advance toward assimilation and modernity—not a mournful cessation of claims engendered by regional Indigenous groups. Moreover, the Rhode Island commission's conclusion appears contrived and perhaps even sinister, given that the state's effort to detribalize the Narragansetts was most likely illegal and usurped the role of the U.S. Congress, which retained sole authority to regulate tribes.

Consequently, in 1898, almost two decades after officially detribalizing the Narragansetts, state leaders continued to struggle with lingering questions about the legality of their actions. In a lengthy eighty-five-page decision, the State Supreme Court aggressively affirmed the authority of Rhode Island lawmakers to disband the Indians. The court explained, "The so-called tribe existed in little more than name, and had for years been in a practically moribund condition, being but a slender band of negroes with a slight infusion of Indian blood."³⁵¹ And while addressing the vexing issue of jurisdiction, the court concluded, "The United States had never by any act recognized their [Narragansetts'] existence as Indians" and

³⁵⁰ Cited in Boissevain, "Detribalization," 11.

³⁵¹ Rhode Island Supreme Court (1898) "Opinion of the Justices of the supreme court, relative to chapter 800 of the public laws" (The Narragansett Indians): given to the Senate, at the January session, 1898, 71.

<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100471757>

“The United States are not obliged to recognize the so-called Narragansett as Indians, any more than they are any other cluster of negroes or dusky complexioned persons, and they have never done so.”³⁵² The court's inimical decision was intended to validate the claim that Rhode Island's Indigenous population had vanished and an amalgamated band with questionable ties to a once great people stood in its place. Such sentiment echoed throughout the region and encouraged those lawmakers who endeavored to dismantle the tribe.

But Rhode Island's top justices did not merely appeal to popular perceptions by invoking the same apocryphal narratives utilized by lawmakers a generation earlier. Instead, the court fixed its decision on a technicality. The United States had never formally recognized the Narragansetts because the Indians crafted their agreements and treaties with now defunct colonial and local authorities.³⁵³ However, more than a century and a half of war, relocation, subjugation, exploitation, and marginalization had rendered the tribe militarily, economically, and politically impotent. As a result, the Narragansetts possessed little practical recourse with which to demand redress, reprieve, or even acknowledgment from the newly formed American government. This postcolonial reality provided Rhode Island's eager court with the perfect tool to exploit to advance its agenda. Still, it is astonishing that Rhode Island authorities decided to invoke the supremacy of the national government to justify their legislative overreach and subversion of federal law. Moreover, the fact that state leaders neither consulted nor sought guidance from Washington during the process of detribalization—and given what one historian called Rhode Island's “maverick reputation” and long-standing aversion to federal authority—the opinion of the court looks as if it was born more out of pragmatism than deference to the

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ One of the most consequential agreements came in 1709 when Narragansett leaders supposedly agreed to forfeit all vacant land within the colony in exchange for the guaranteed protection of a sixty-four square mile tract.

central government.³⁵⁴ Moreover, the justices' proclamation that the Narragansetts had never been formally recognized seems disingenuous given the region's long history of cross-cultural interactions dating back to 1524, when upon meeting a group of Natives in Narragansett Bay, Giovanni de Verrazzano described the Indians as friendly and the "most beautiful" he had seen.³⁵⁵ At any rate, the court's decision enabled Rhode Island leaders to purge the Narragansetts from state records. In fact, it would be almost forty years before state officials rendered a judgment or enacted legislation pertaining to the tribe. However, tribal members continued to hold their annual celebration in August and to attend services at their church in Charlestown. In fact, the Narragansett Indian Church was more than just a house of worship because it also served as a meeting place where the supposedly disbanded Narragansetts continued to discuss and decide community-wide matters. The tribal elder and former chief Walter (Kenny) Babcock explains why the church was built with two front doors and no door in the back: "They used it [the church] as a meeting house. If they saw anyone from the state coming down the road, they would pick up the bibles and pretend as though they were praising the Lord. You see there was no door in the back, so no one could seek up on them."³⁵⁶

When facing the heat of a summer sun, snow does not simply disappear. It might melt and seep back into the earth or evaporate into the air. But in either case, the snow does not entirely vanish but is transformed. Similarly, the periods of ethnogenesis precipitated by the pressures of colonization and detribalization transformed the Narragansetts. But much like

³⁵⁴ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2007), 119.

³⁵⁵ Cited in Ronald D. Karr, ed., *Indian New England 1524–1674: A Compendium of Eyewitness Accounts of Native American Life* (Pepperell: Branch Line Press, 1999), 21.

³⁵⁶ Walter (Kenny) Babcock in discussion with the author, November 2016.

evaporated water when it rains or the moisture drawn from the earth by roots, the Indians would make their presence known once again.

Chapter 4 - The Hill

Ellison “Tarzan” Brown’s effort to this point in the Boston Marathon appeared almost superhuman as he bounded past checkpoints in world-record fashion.³⁵⁷ In fact, Brown pulled away from the pack of other runners so quickly that when members of the press crew arrived at the first checkpoint, they were shocked to learn that they had mistakenly spent the last five miles following the second group of runners.³⁵⁸ Brown’s lead in the famed race remained unchallenged for the first two-thirds of the contest but by the seventeenth mile the runner was exhausted and the furious pace he had set began to exact its toll. But while the runner’s muscles stiffened so did his determination. When Brown entered the Woodland Park section of the race, he received some much needed emotional encouragement from a delegation of Narragansett Indians—some dressed in full ceremonial regalia and playing drums.³⁵⁹ Brown’s resolve was strengthened by the entourage when they ran along his side blowing kisses and shouting encouragements.³⁶⁰ It is no wonder then, that when he exited the park, Brown was on pace to shatter the course record.³⁶¹

However, three miles further along in the race, fatigue once again slowed Brown’s pace. But, another burst of emotion—this time derived from an unlikely source—would once again fill

³⁵⁷ David E. Martin and Roger W. H. Gynn, *The Marathon Footrace: Performers and Performances* (Springfield, OH: Charles C. Thomas, 1979), 123. Brown completed the first 11 miles of the race in 55 minutes.

³⁵⁸ John Christian Hopkins, “The Legend of Tarzan (Brown, that is),” *Four Corners Freepress*, August 23, 2014, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://fourcornersfreepress.com/?p=2041>

³⁵⁹ Throughout this article, I use the terms Indian, Native, Native American, indigenous, and tribe interchangeably. Scholars mostly agree that the terms Native, Native American, and indigenous are appropriate and when the Narragansett reincorporated in 1935, they referred to themselves as the “Narragansett Indian Tribe.”

³⁶⁰ Michael Ward, *Ellison “Tarzan” Brown: The Narragansett Indian Who Twice Won the Boston Marathon* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 65.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

the runner's heart and help to propel him forward. As John Kelly—the runner who had won the race the year before and remained a perennial favorite—caught up to the tiring Brown he patted the runner on the back, as if to “say nice try,” and then proceeded to pass him.³⁶² What happened next has become part of race folklore and may have resulted in the naming of the marathon's most famous stretch.³⁶³ Brown, refusing to bow out, battled Kelly over the hilly expanse from Woodland Park to Lake Street. Brown retook the lead—for good this time—as he charged down the hills leaving Kelly behind.³⁶⁴ This section of the course thereafter became known as the “heartbreak hills,” the place where Brown broke Kelly's heart.³⁶⁵ Brown went on to win the Boston Marathon in 1936, and in doing so, he became the only Native American to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic team for the games that were to be held in Berlin later that same year.

In 1939, Brown once again won the Boston Marathon setting a new world record in the process.³⁶⁶ Although Brown's physical feats remain impressive, this chapter is not about the runner's athletic accomplishments. Instead, this work focuses on what these victories meant to and did for a small and “forgotten” Indigenous community living in the secluded marshlands of southern Rhode Island. More specifically, it is about how Brown and some of his Narragansett brethren parlayed the runner's physical accomplishments into meaningful, community-wide social, economic, and political advancements. Victory helped to make Brown—and the community from which he hailed—visible to a populace that had for years both lamented and professed the tribe's supposed demise. The Narragansetts made use of this brief moment of

³⁶² Tom Derderian, *Boston Marathon: The History of the World's Premier Running Event* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 153.

³⁶³ Hopkins, “The Legend of Tarzan.”

³⁶⁴ Martin and Gynn, *Marathon*, 123.

³⁶⁵ Derderian, *Boston Marathon*, 153.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

celebration and inclusion to prod the state of Rhode Island to officially recognize the continued existence of their community. The Native Americans who cheered “Tarzan” on in his sprint through Woodland Park did not attend the spectacle simply to revel in Brown’s fleeting fame and participate in the celebration customarily bestowed upon the winner of the race.³⁶⁷ Instead, the Indians made their way from Rhode Island to Boston in the midst of a spirit-crushing economic depression so that they could publicly play their drums, don their Western-style headdresses, and let the world know—or at least the three-quarters of a million spectators in attendance—that, in the words of the tribe’s chief sachem Phillip H. Peckham, “The Indian still lives.”³⁶⁸

Just eight years before Brown’s initial victory in Boston, another Narragansett runner—Horatius “Bunk” Stanton—traveled to Maine and attempted to register for a race. Upon hearing the athlete declare that he was a Narragansett Indian, an official asked Stanton to sit and wait to be registered. After all of the other contestants were certified, the official held out his hand and said, “Well Chief you’re the first Narragansett I’ve heard of since King Philip’s War. Any more where you come from?” The registrar continued to explain that he “thought they [the Narragansetts] were all wiped out.”³⁶⁹ It is not surprising that a race official in Maine had been unaware of the continued existence of two hundred Natives living in the secluded forest and swamps of southern Rhode Island. As discussed, in the aftermath of King Phillip’s War, the prevailing social narrative led many to erroneously believe that the Narragansetts no longer

³⁶⁷ According to tribal lore, Ellison Brown was given the nickname Tarzan because he could move through the woods and swamps of southern Rhode Island as deftly as Edgar Rice Burrough’s fictional character “Tarzan” could move through the jungle. However, some authors posit that the name was given to Brown by competitors who marveled the runner’s seemingly natural almost animalistic prowess. Many Narragansett also knew Ellison Brown by the nickname ‘Deer foot.’

³⁶⁸ Princess Redwing and Ernest Hazard, “The Narragansett Dawn” (2006). Special Collections Publications (Miscellaneous). Paper 5, Vol. 2 No. 4, accessed January 15, 2017, http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/sc_pubs/5

³⁶⁹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol. 1, No. 1

existed. This misconception was not only perpetuated in folklore, but it was also corroborated by scholars who relied too heavily upon dubious accounts and partial records. For example, just one year prior to Stanton's trip to Maine and ten years before Brown's adventure in Berlin, Alice Collins Gleeson wrote in *Colonial Rhode Island* that "after this defeat [King Philip's War], the Rhode Island Indians had no independent life...their strength had gone and they passed away."³⁷⁰ The author's assertion simply reiterated and affirmed what many people in Rhode Island and others throughout New England believed, "that the Narragansett had vanished."³⁷¹

However, this construct of the "vanishing-Indian" was not limited to the Narragansetts. Instead, it was used to explain what appeared to be the general disappearance of Indigenous communities throughout North America. For centuries colonists and later Americans sought to subjugate, marginalize, and segregate, Native peoples. And the belief systems they created not only reflected these desires but over time, helped to affirm them. Historian Philip J. Deloria explains that ideologies are not necessarily true "but, as things that structure real belief and action in a real world, they might as well be."³⁷² By the early twentieth-century, the fact that few Americans interacted with—or recognized when they did interact with—Indigenous peoples seemed to confirm the ideal of the vanishing-Indian. Ideology "is a lived experience," writes Deloria, "something we see and perform on a daily basis."³⁷³ The registrar's sincere amazement at meeting Stanton attested to both the efficacy and pervasiveness of an ideal that purported the demise of Indigenous communities.

³⁷⁰ Alice Collins Gleeson papers Gleeson (Alice Collins) papers, MS.1U.G4, John Hay Library Special Collections

³⁷¹ Patricia Ruberton, *Grave Undertaking: An Archaeology of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001), 61.

³⁷² Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 9.

³⁷³ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 9.

Postulations about the death of the Narragansetts were not solely derived from—and perpetuated by—the misinformed. In linking the tribe’s expiration to the aftermath of King Phillip’s War, European colonists and their descendants intentionally reframed what was a complex struggle into a binary of winners and losers. Such narratives obscure the high level of tightly interwoven and intercultural alliances forged between Natives and colonizers. Rather the story was reduced to a confrontation between a supposedly antiquated group of Indians and the more modern European settlers. Or, as Lepore makes clear, in the contest for meaning “the colonists won.”³⁷⁴ Indeed, the European victory made possible a historical interpretation in which the triumph of the colonists and the supposed degeneration of the Indians appeared benign, natural, or even providential.

Erroneous accounts of the tribe’s demise were also reinforced and propagated by the popular media. For example, between 1900 and 1920, *The Providence Journal*—Rhode Island’s leading newspaper—printed a total of eight articles about the Narragansetts. Six of these stories discussed the waning of the tribe or the passing of individual members, including a story published in April 1907 about the death of Abigail R. Smith whom the paper labeled “A true Narragansett.”³⁷⁵ Likewise, another article printed in June 1908 covered the passing of Benjamin Noka whom the *Journal* declared to be the “last of [the] Narragansett Indians.”³⁷⁶ Deloria argues that this common trope of the vanishing-Indian helped to erase “white acts of dispossession and generously mourned the fact that Indians were disappearing naturally.”³⁷⁷ Similarly, the scholar Siobhan Senier observes that this myth “exercises special force east of the Mississippi” and

³⁷⁴ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), xvi.

³⁷⁵ *Providence Journal*, April 14, 1907, S4, 8.

³⁷⁶ “Benjamin Noka Last of Narragansett Indians, died,” *Providence Journal*, March 4, 1908, 1.

³⁷⁷ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 50.

“takes particular shape in New England” where “Yankees like to believe that Native people ‘died off’ (or ‘lost’) early on and that those who didn’t die were ‘assimilated’ or have ‘very little real Indian blood.’”³⁷⁸ Moreover, the historian Jean M. O’Brien demonstrates that throughout the nineteenth-century, writers in New England produced “replacement narratives” to negate “previous Indian history as a ‘dead end’ (literally).”³⁷⁹ Writers who endeavored to erase or diminish the historical significance and continued presence of the Narragansetts chose instead to celebrate what they deemed to be a “glorious New England history of just relations and property transactions...that legitimated their claims to the land.”³⁸⁰ O’Brien explains that such narratives enabled writers and their readers to “rationalize their history of settler colonialism” and claim “New England as their own.”³⁸¹ These “histories” not only perpetuated and bolstered the trope of the vanishing Indian but they—along with the *Journal’s* lamentations of the tribe’s supposed passing—also informed cross-cultural interactions in Rhode Island. Thus, accounts of the tribe’s demise worked to further marginalize the Narragansetts because these narratives allowed writers, readers, and leaders to claim that—through no fault of their own—the Narragansetts no longer existed and thus it was the Puritans and their posterity who could claim rightful ownership of the region.

Against this backdrop, the establishment of new land claims advanced by tribal members beginning in 1921 led to confrontations with local white populations. Some Rhode Islanders turned away from lamentations about the death of Native populations to openly challenging the

³⁷⁸ Siobhan Senier, ed; *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing From New England* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 2.

³⁷⁹ Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out Of Existence In New England* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 55.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

validity of those who claimed Narragansett heritage. In an article titled “Narragansett Indians Again Seek Return of Lands,” the *Journal* cited a nineteenth-century report that claimed, “extinction by nature of the diluted Narragansett blood was imminent.”³⁸² Also quoted in the story was one Rhode Island town clerk who explained that the Indians “have not, so far as I can judge, anything tangible upon which to base their [land] claim.”³⁸³ Through the course of publicly mourning the imagined demise of the Indians and challenging the authenticity of their remaining descendants, many Rhode Islanders propagated an enduring narrative that proclaimed nothing less than the extinction of the Narragansett tribe.

In the decades that followed state-sanctioned detribalization, some Narragansett leaders attempted to restore the tribe’s public identity and implored local and federal authorities for redress. For example, in 1921, tribal members sought the return of ancestral land that the Indians claimed was taken illegally. However, the case was quickly dismissed because—according to the state—the Narragansetts did not exist.³⁸⁴ Stymied by the courts in Rhode Island, the Narragansett leader Chief William I. Bent appealed to Washington and inquired how the Federal Government might recognize the tribe. In its response to Bent, the Department of the Interior explained that “the Narragansett tribe of Indians long ago became extinct” and that the Federal Government had no jurisdiction or control over their descendants.³⁸⁵ Unwilling to acquiesce in the erasure of their collective identity, beginning in the early 1920s the Narragansetts introduced a powwow as a component of their Annual August Meeting.³⁸⁶ The well-advertised spectacle was intended to

³⁸² “Narragansett Indians Again Seek Return of Lands,” *Providence Journal*, June 12, 1921, 5.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Rhode Island General Assembly, *House Resolution (H 530)*, January 7, 1932, Rhode Island State Archives.

³⁸⁵ E. B. Meritt, 9455-1921 File No. 211, Indian Office Files: National Archives.

³⁸⁶ United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs: Office of Federal Acknowledgement, July 29, 1982. Accessed on January 26, 2015, <http://www.bia.gov/cs/groups/xofa/documents/text/idc-001511.pdf>

help elevate the tribe's public profile through cultural exhibition and social exchange. However, despite the continued advocacy of tribal members, a decade later, little had changed. This reality is evidenced by another territorial dispute raised in 1931 by the Narragansett elder and Councilman Rev. Daniel Sekater. Sekater's claim suffered a fate that was both similar to the result of the challenge posed by tribal leaders ten years earlier, and reminiscent of the dismissiveness that had frustrated Bent's inquiry. This was because Sekater's appeal—and in essence the Narragansetts themselves—were again dismissed as illegitimate.³⁸⁷

It is likely Sekater understood that his challenge would be summarily dismissed but his seemingly futile effort was indicative of the desperation experienced by many living in the region during the 1930s. Even before the stock market crashed in 1929, Rhode Island's economy was in rapid decline because the state's aging textile mills could not compete with the low wages and cheap fabrics of the industrialized New South.³⁸⁸ The Depression only intensified a collapse that by 1932 placed more than 115,000 able body Rhode Islanders on financial relief.³⁸⁹ The Narragansetts suffered disproportionately in the region's hardships because—like many African Americans—they were relegated to the bottom of a racialized social, political, and economic hierarchy. The marathon chronicler Tom Derderian communicated the unique social and economic conditions faced by many Narragansetts when he wrote that:

The economy in these depression times provided little for most Americans and nothing for Indians. They were a conquered people living on the margin, living on the meager scraps tossed out from an impoverished marketplace.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ *Westerly Sun*, July 25, 1932.

³⁸⁸ William McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 195.

³⁸⁹ George H. Kellner and J. Stanley Lemons, *Rhode Island: The Independent State* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1982), 122.

³⁹⁰ Dederian, *Boston Marathon*, 151.

Although the Narragansetts were hardly a conquered people, throughout the 1930s many tribal members certainly lived on the margin and Brown was no exception. Growing up in what one writer described as “intense poverty,” Brown may have, as Derderian claimed, seen running as his only escape.³⁹¹ The Indian runner would often walk up to forty miles to compete in races with the hope of winning some type of monetary reward.³⁹² In fact, because Brown sometimes found that the wristwatch awarded to the second place finisher was of greater value than the trophy presented to whoever came in first, the runner could at times be seen looking over the slate of prizes awarded to the top competitors and planning his performance accordingly.³⁹³

Although Brown saw running as a means to better his own economic condition, it is likely that the runner and his Native brethren also viewed these popular competitions as a way to elevate the public profile of their entire community. In fact, Brown was often joined by varying tribal members on his long walks to the starting line. For example, in anticipation of Brown’s arrival at a race in 1935, the *Boston Globe* stated that the runner would be accompanied “by seven sturdy braves and three haughty chiefs.”³⁹⁴ Those Indians who escorted Brown did not simply intend to profit from the proceeds of a timepiece or a trophy. Instead, they traveled with the hope that the deeds of their countryman could be exchanged for something that was—in their eyes—much more valuable: public acknowledgement and the economic opportunities and relevancy that it portended.

The strategy proved effective because after decades of disregard, and just five years following Sekater’s defeat, the Narragansett suddenly reemerge in state records. The tribe was

³⁹¹ Ward, *Ellison “Tarzan” Brown*, 5.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹³ John C. Hopkins, “The Legend of Tarzan (Brown, that is),” *Four Corners Press*, August 23, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://fourcornersfreepress.com/?p=2041>

³⁹⁴ *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1935, 30.

officially reinstated when Rhode Islanders began to marvel at the exploits of Ellison Brown whom they hoped to claim as one of their own. Indeed, as Brown raced along the pathways of New England, he ran down more than just his athletic rivals, and on April 24, 1936, just four days after the Narragansett's victory in Boston, the Rhode Island General Assembly approved an act "providing for the observance of a special holiday, known as Indian day."³⁹⁵ The *Journal* left little ambiguity about what had spurred lawmakers when it declared, "R.I. Indian Day Set Aside in Honor to Marathon Victor."³⁹⁶ The action of the General Assembly constituted the state's first official reference to the Narragansetts since the justices handed down their seemingly definitive decision in 1898. Hence, Brown's athleticism and the acclaim it accrued provided the Narragansetts with a new opportunity to profess the continuance of their community. And while Rhode Islanders reveled in Brown's victories, the Narragansetts seized upon the adulation of their neighbors to challenge more than a half-century of systematic neglect. It was in this way that Brown's celebrity became the tribe's success.

After having shown the Indians nothing but disregard for so long, it might seem inconceivable that Rhode Island's leaders would celebrate Brown's athleticism and openly acknowledge the runner's indigeneity. However, if one recalls how Americans marveled at and championed the physical achievements of earlier Indigenous athletes such as James Francis Thorpe and Andrew Sockalexis, or if we consider how whites contemporaneously embraced the athletic successes of other traditionally marginalized persons such as Jesse Owens and Joe Louis, it is easier to comprehend Rhode Island's remarkable reversal.

³⁹⁵ Rhode Island General Assembly (1936), "Chapter 2331," Rhode Island State Archives.

³⁹⁶ "R. I. Indian Day Set Aside in Honor to Marathon Victor," *Providence Journal*, April 27, 1936, 13.

When James "Jim" Thorpe (Sac and Fox), Andrew Sockalexis (Penobscot), and Louis Tewanima (Hopi) represented the United States in 1912, at the V Olympiad in Stockholm, they did so to cheers of support that, according to one historian, “resonated among people across the nation.”³⁹⁷ Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert explains that because national pride permeated athletics in the United States, white Americans could root unreservedly for a Native American when he competed against athletes from around the world. Therefore, as the author observes, “When Native runners stepped on to the track field and took their mark at the starting line, their brown skin and ‘uncivilized’ heritage momentarily held little significance for white spectators and those in the media.”³⁹⁸ A similar sentiment was held by many Rhode Islanders who desired to appropriate the athletic successes of Brown. However, the Narragansetts intentionally turned the runner’s indigeneity into a spectacle making it impossible to separate Brown from his heritage.

Like they had been in 1912, international tensions were heightened in the years before Brown’s win in Boston and by 1936, with Berlin holding what promised to be the most politically charged Olympic Games in modern history, Americans searched far and wide for their athletic redeemers. National sentiment was aptly captured by a Rhode Island newspaper when—in anticipation of the upcoming Olympic qualifier in Boston—it concluded that, “It’s a miracle man the Olympic committee is looking for, not a runner.”³⁹⁹ The nation would find some of its miracle men in those persons who had previously been relegated to the fringes of American society.

³⁹⁷ Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, “Hopi Footraces and American Marathons, 1912–1930”*American Quarterly* (2010): 93.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ *Westerly Sun*, January 22, 1936, 1.

Brown was just one of the many athletes plucked from the ranks of the disenfranchised and charged with delivering international prestige to the United States in the 1930s. Indeed, white Americans would ardently celebrate the pre-war success of both the runner Jesse Owens (1913-1980) and the boxer Joe Louis (1914-1981). Like Brown, these African American athletes carried a double burden because they not only represented the desires of white Americans who hoped to affirm the ascendancy of their political, social, and economic systems, but Owens and Louis also carried with them the desires of many African Americans who hoped that the successes of their black brethren would lay bare the inequities harbored within these same systems championed by many whites.

With Adolf Hitler taking the reins in Germany in 1933, the Berlin games were set as a showcase for international supremacy with each event holding the potential for national aggrandizement. And, although Germany would win the medal count, the XI Olympic Games would not be remembered as a tribute to that nation's hegemony because Jesse Owens convincingly and singlehandedly dismantled the myth of Aryan supremacy when he won an unprecedented four gold medals and set three world records in the span of forty-five minutes.⁴⁰⁰ Americans—overjoyed with the successes of their black thoroughbred—celebrated Owens as the physical embodiment of their nation's superiority. But for many African Americans, the runner's success connoted more than national pride because it “gave Black America hope,” writes Dave Zirin, “when there appeared to be nothing but despair, discrimination, degradation and defeat.”⁴⁰¹ Indeed, some African Americans interpreted Owens' victory not only as a rebuke of Aryan dogma, but also as a challenge to the racist ideologies that buttressed American society because,

⁴⁰⁰ William J. Baker, *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 292.

⁴⁰¹ Dave Zirin, *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People, and Play* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 80.

in their eyes, the runner had revealed to the world what a Black man could accomplish given an equal playing field—or perhaps more appropriately—the same starting line.

Just as some African Americans had affixed their dreams of a more inclusive nation upon Owens, so too did many see the possibility of communal redemption in the athletic achievements of the boxer Joe Louis. The economic downturn that plagued America throughout the 1930s was especially difficult for African Americans who were, according to one historian, “traditionally the last hired and the first fired.”⁴⁰² David M. Kennedy shows that although the national unemployment rate hovered at nearly-twenty five percent, in black communities the numbers skewed much higher.⁴⁰³ Thus, the Depression added yet another burden upon a people who had struggled for many years under the stifling weight of systematic racism. The African American poet Langston Hughes (1902-1967) aptly described the situation faced by many blacks when he wrote, “The depression brought everybody down a peg or two....And the Negroes had but a few pegs to fall.”⁴⁰⁴ These were the social and economic realities heartening the promise many African Americans located in Joe Louis. However, the boxer was more than just a black heavyweight champion. He was an American champion because many whites also held high expectations for their black gladiator. In 1938, white and black Americans alike cheered fervently when Louis defeated the German boxer Max Schmeling—whom Hitler had promoted as the embodiment of Aryan supremacy.⁴⁰⁵ However, like Owens’s successes, Louis’s victory held a deeper meaning for many African Americans because they believed in the possibility that

⁴⁰² David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Cited in Nancy A. Hewitt and Steven F. Lawson, *Exploring American Histories: A Brief Survey with Sources* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2013), 691.

⁴⁰⁵ Zirin, *A People’s History*, 82.

the Brown Bomber's punches pummeled more than just the body of Schmeling and the fallacy of Aryan supremacy. They also hoped the blows of their champion could be felt by those American Schmeling who had upheld the myth of white supremacy and kept an unrelenting foot pressed upon the neck of Black America. Still, the greatest hardships of the Depression era did not fall solely upon the shoulders of African Americans. Nor were blacks the only marginalized group hoping with trepidation that the athletic successes of one of their own could be transformed into communal redemption, because the privations borne by Brown and his Indian supporters inspired similar hopes among the Narragansetts.

When Brown won the Boston Marathon in 1936—defeating a field of athletes that included some of the greatest distance runners in American history—he became the nation's top competitor in the event. Some Narragansetts envisioned in Brown an ambassador who could dispel the fallacy of the tribe's demise and prove the continued relevance of the Narragansett people. Therefore—like Owens and Louis—Brown carried with him not only the pride and adulation of his country but also the hopes and aspirations of his fellow tribal members. Hence, by virtue of his impressive showing in Boston, the twenty-two-year-old Brown became not only his nation's greatest opportunity for victory in Berlin but also his people's best hope for redemption in Rhode Island. In a speech delivered at the tribe's Annual August Meeting and powwow just three months after Brown's victory, Chief Peckham articulated the optimism held by many. The sachem declared to all in attendance that "The Narragansett have been in the background heretofore but as the last shall be first, so we are now at the dawn of great recognition."⁴⁰⁶ Peckham was referring anxiously to Brown's upcoming effort in Berlin. The Chief continued, "What could be more fitting than to have one of our very own tribesmen win

⁴⁰⁶ Cited in Redwing and Hazard, "Narragansett Dawn," Vol. 2, No. 4.

this race?” Peckham told his listeners that Brown deserved “all of the honor and praise he will receive” but that the fruits of this acclaim would accrue to the entire tribe. Because as others recognized and celebrated the Narragansett runner, they were also forced to admit that “the Indian still lives!”⁴⁰⁷

Brown’s success did bring greater exposure to a community that had been largely forgotten and dismissed by the outside world. For example, between 1851 and 1940, the *New York Times* printed a total of twenty-six articles that related to the Narragansett Indians. Of these stories, five covered the deaths of individual members or the waning of the tribe as a whole, whereas sixteen of the stories recounted Brown’s athletic exploits. This pattern also held true for regional dailies because a more concise and localized analysis reveals that in the four years between 1930 and 1934 the *Westerly Sun*—the principal newspaper of southern Rhode Island—ran a total of fifteen stories concerning the Narragansetts. However, during the next four years—a period of time over which Brown’s athletic prowess was proven—the *Sun* printed forty-six articles about the Narragansetts including fourteen that pertained exclusively to the Indian runner. It is clear that—just as Peckham promised—Brown’s celebrity led to greater publicity. And as newspapermen recounted the athletic accomplishments of the Indian runner, they also increased the general public’s awareness about the survival and continuation of the Narragansett Indian community.

Brown and his Indian supporters were keenly aware that high profile competition held the promise of greater recognition. In fact, as Brown raced his way into Woodland Park in 1936, it was Stanton who sprinted to his side blowing kisses and encouraging the runner along.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ *Boston Globe*, April 21, 1936, 25.

Stanton, himself a veteran athlete, understood that the publicity and pageantry associated with a victory in the world's premier running event would elevate not only Brown's personal profile, but also that of the entire Narragansett Indian community. Thus, Stanton made the trip to Boston not just to encourage his protégé, but also to support his people. The Indian's appearance drove home the point because as he matched Brown stride for stride through Woodland Park, Stanton did so in full regalia complete with a headdress. Although the press corps snickered and derided the Indians as they cheered Brown through the park, there was no denying that he was their man. The runner about to win the venerated marathon was a Narragansett. Brown's victory and the Indians who publicly celebrated their champion made it abundantly clear to all observers that the tribe did not simply pass away as the state of Rhode Island had claimed. Instead, by piecing together the remnants of their people, culture, and traditions, the Narragansetts maintained a distinct—and now because of Brown's success—undeniable presence in southern Rhode Island.

In an address at the state's very first Indian Day celebration in 1936, Princess Red Wing—a social, political, and cultural leader among the Narragansetts—reminded her listeners that the Indians had “cheered Ellison Brown on his upward path to victory in the marathon races when the world knew him not.”⁴⁰⁹ However, some of Brown's Indigenous brethren did more than applaud the runner, they also actively supported Brown and helped contribute to his success. For example, despite the fact that many of the Indians were impoverished, tribal members were able to establish a fund to help pay for Brown's racing expenses.⁴¹⁰ Similarly, the Narragansett elder Evangeline Babcock Hankinson recalled the stories her father—Thomas Babcock—told her about his experiences in assisting Brown to better prepare his body for the physical grind of a

⁴⁰⁹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol. 2, No. 4.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 2, No. 1.

marathon. According to Hankinson, her father attached buckets filled with water to the ends of a railroad tie so that Brown—who had no access to more traditional exercise equipment—could use these “weights” to build up his strength and endurance.⁴¹¹ The maintenance of the race fund and Hankinson’s recollection extends our understanding of how the Narragansett community became invested in Brown’s athleticism “when the world knew him not.”

Redwing’s speech, the fund, and Hankinson’s recollection suggest, the Narragansett were, for the most part, a tightly knit community.⁴¹² The realities of discrimination, isolation, and economic hardship only abetted the tribe’s coming together because the Indians often derived strength, acceptance, and even sustenance from each other.⁴¹³ For example, when Charles Babcock—a prominent member of the tribe—was hospitalized in 1936, close to one hundred Narragansett attended a “supper” and fundraiser held for his benefit. The event was indicative of the tribe’s communal nature because there were scarcely more than one hundred Narragansetts still residing in the area.⁴¹⁴ Moreover, when Sekater introduced his claim in 1931, the *Journal* avowed that it was “only with the thought of justice for the remaining 118 Narragansett that he [Sekater] plans to ask for redress.”⁴¹⁵ At the age of seventy-eight, Sekater held little hope that this case might result in his own material betterment or that of his kin because the Reverend had

⁴¹¹ Hankinson Evangeline, Interview conducted by the author, May 25, 2014.

⁴¹² This is not to suggest that there were not, at times, significant divisions and infighting within the tribe. For example, the *Dawn* itself was somewhat controversial because it was produced and championed by a younger contingent who advocated for a more public tribal presence. However, when presented with challenges from outside the community, the Narragansett tended to close ranks.

⁴¹³ Siobhan ed., *Dawnland*, Thawn Harris, 450-1.

⁴¹⁴ A tribal census conducted in 1935, counted 259 Narragansett. However, some of this number did not reside close to the tribe’s ancestral land in southern Rhode Island. And although the Journals count of 118 Narragansett in 1931 was almost certainly low, the number most likely represented a majority of those who still lived in the area.

⁴¹⁵ *Providence Journal*, March 22, 1931, 2.

no direct descendants. It is clear, then, that the Narragansett elder was more concerned with communal advancement than with personal gain. As an elderly man with no successors, Sekater may not have feared reprisals from the white majority as much as some of his Indigenous brethren and it is possible that the elder was simply the named litigant representing a larger contingent of Narragansetts.

Regardless of what the particular circumstances of Sekater's claim might have been, the elder openly embraced and espoused a communal identity that proved incessant. Invoking such ethnic homogeneity not only helped to shelter the Narragansetts from the most extreme privations of subjugation and disregard, but it also enabled tribal members to mitigate the psychological liabilities of their current misfortunes by summoning recollections of a proud past and envisioning a future when the Indians could reclaim former glories or at least public relevance. In the essay "If You Have Narragansett Blood—Join Us" penned by Ernest "Eagle Eye" Hazard in 1935, the Indian writer sought to encourage his Indigenous brethren when he explained that although others "stand back and make all manner of fun of us, because we declare we are Narragansett," the tribe was in good company because Robert Fulton, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and even Jesus were all ridiculed by others but these individuals had remained firm in their convictions.⁴¹⁶ "These men were all laughed at," wrote Hazard, "and considered queer, so let us older ones stick to our convictions, that the young may take heart."⁴¹⁷ Even in the face of public ridicule, Hazard and other Narragansetts recognized the importance of invoking, preserving, and strengthening their collective identity and passing on to their descendants an appreciation for the tribal community.

⁴¹⁶ Redwing and Hazard, "Narragansett Dawn," Vol. 1, No. 2.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

Similarly, in its very first issue, the *Narragansett Dawn*—a monthly newsletter produced by tribal members and disseminated to audiences around the globe—proclaimed “We Narragansett of today must advance through our young.”⁴¹⁸ The *Dawn*, along with Hazard’s appeal and Sekater’s claim, revealed that various tribal members desired to bequeath more favorable social, political, and economic conditions to their posterity. But as the *Dawn* and Hazard had explained, to realize these ambitions the tribe needed to focus its efforts, and Brown provided the Indians with an ideal opportunity to do so. For example, in 1935, just days after the death of his mother and escorted by close to twenty Narragansetts, a grieving Brown arrived in Boston to compete in the marathon. The *Dawn* reported that it was Grace Babcock Brown’s dying wish that her son runs the race.⁴¹⁹ It is possible that, like Sekater, Grace Brown may have thought of the greater Narragansett community and the prospects associated with victory when she encouraged her son to compete. But even if this was not the case, those who accompanied Brown were certainly concerned with professing the tribe’s continued existence because the Indians arrived in full regalia for all to see. The runner even competed in an outfit stitched together from his late mother’s ceremonial dress.⁴²⁰ In Brown, then, the Narragansetts had finally found a potential pathway out of obscurity.

Moreover, Brown understood his triumph in 1936 to be more than just a personal victory because as he broke the tape at the end of the Boston Marathon the exhausted runner cried out “we done it.”⁴²¹ Maybe Brown thought of Stanton and the other Narragansetts who had helped stiffen his determination as he sprinted through Woodland Park. Or the runner might have

⁴¹⁸ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol. 1, No. 3.

⁴¹⁹ Siobhan Ed., *Dawnland*, 509.

⁴²⁰ Ward, *Ellison ‘Tarzan’ Brown*, 28.

⁴²¹ Cited in Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.2, No. 2.

recalled his training sessions with Babcock and the assistance he received from untold others within the tribal community. Perhaps Brown was thinking of his Indigenous brethren who had accompanied him on his long walks to the starting line. Still, it may have been his mother or all of the Narragansetts that the runner had in mind when he exclaimed “we done it.” Whoever it was that Brown had thought of when he crossed the finish line, it was clear that he believed his success was shared. It can be proposed that the next day when Brown told reporters that “maybe now the white man will take me seriously,” he was including the same “we” who had helped him win the race.⁴²² Because of his victory in Boston the white man did indeed take notice of Brown and the Indigenous community from which he hailed. Just as it had done for African Americans, athletic success provided the Narragansetts with a modicum of social relevancy and the Indians seized this opportunity to reassert publicly their presence and proclaim their heritage.

Although Brown’s athleticism and the acclaim it garnered were essential in capturing the attention of the general public, what white Rhode Islanders saw when they finally did gaze upon the Indians, was in many ways, just as important. In order to be accepted by the white majority, after having had their ethnic and racial authenticity challenged for so long, the Narragansetts needed to portray what their Caucasian observers believed to be the genuine traits of Indigenous peoples. That is why tribal members attended Brown’s races in regalia fashioned in the Western-style, donned headdresses, and played their drums. However, this is not to suggest that the Narragansetts sought validation from the majority, but instead conformity on the part of the Indians was strategic because, if the past half-century had taught them anything, it was that perception mattered. Brown certainly looked the part because the Narragansett champion appeared to be the very embodiment of a Hollywood stereotype, save the long braided hair, an

⁴²² Cited in Ward, *Ellison ‘Tarzan’ Brown*, 2.

omission the public probably accepted because Brown was a runner. Indeed, with his bronze colored skin, straight black hair, high cheekbones, and thin lips, Brown resembled what many whites had envisioned a Indian to look like. It was his appearance that rivaled the runner's athleticism for coverage in the press as reporters sought to describe the Indian, or what one writer called "the ethnological mystery man," to their readers.⁴²³ For example, Jack Barnwell of *The Boston Post* referred to Brown as a "full-blooded Indian" and a "mahogany-hued...dark-skinned warrior." Ruth C. Bodwell also writing for the *Post* described the Indian as "brown-skinned and as smooth-cheeked as a girl." Will Cloney of *The Boston Herald* called Brown a "penniless redskin."⁴²⁴ In essence, what the reporters were telling their audiences was that this man looked Native. Albeit offensive in many respects, the descriptions employed by the newspapermen helped to certify the Indian's authenticity because it was these reporters who first described Brown as "full-blooded" when the last of the Narragansetts had supposedly died off decades earlier. For a people trying to publicly assert their ethnic and racial authenticity, Brown's appearance and the ink it generated looked to be a godsend.

Because the runner delivered both athletically and aesthetically on the promise that some tribal members had vested in him, by the time of Redwing's address in 1936, the world had come to know Brown. In fact, even as the Narragansett leader spoke, Brown was in Berlin and anticipation of the Indian runner's world debut was high. The excitement was especially palpable in Rhode Island because the Olympic Games coincided with the state's tercentennial celebration. In a region where whites were originally only allowed to settle because of the generosity of the Narragansetts, it appeared serendipitous that a descendant of this tribe would bring international

⁴²³ *Boston Herald*, March 22, 1936, 33.

⁴²⁴ Derderian, *Boston Marathon*, 152.

glory and honor to the progeny of the Puritan's as they celebrated their three hundredth year. It was the Providence Tercentennial Committee that sponsored Brown's trip to Boston and funded the latter part of his training. But, as Americans—and in particular Rhode Islanders—prepared to celebrate the athleticism of their native son, they were also forced to acknowledge that this son was indeed Native. It is revealing that the arguments and assumptions made by state officials during the era of detribalization and reiterated by detractors for more than fifty years, were forgotten or dismissed once Brown's athletic prowess was proven. For example, the day after the runner's victory in Boston, a headline in the *Sun* stated "Tarzan Brown, Full Blooded Narragansett Indian Wins BAA Marathon." The questions about authenticity and blood quantum that had long dogged the Narragansetts suddenly disappeared as Rhode Islanders eagerly accepted the Indian runner as one of their own.

Upon his return to Rhode Island, Brown was hailed as nothing less than a conquering hero. There were at least three official state and locally sponsored receptions in his honor. At the festivities held in Providence—Rhode Island's capital—Mayor James Dunne and a host of other city officials lined up to congratulate the Indian. While shaking Brown's hand, Dunne revealed what had precipitated all of the pomp and excitement when he remarked "I hope that there is absolutely no question of your participation in the Olympics."⁴²⁵ The Mayor and many other Rhode Islanders were aware that by virtue of his victory in Boston, the Indian's Olympic aspirations had increased exponentially. Dunne had made it clear that Rhode Islanders were eager to ride the runner's coattails all the way to Berlin. Similarly, as Lieutenant Governor Robert Quinn congratulated Brown, he stated: "I'm going to shake again and wish you the best

⁴²⁵ *Providence Journal*, April 22, 1936, 9.

of luck in Berlin.”⁴²⁶ Before exiting the Governor’s office, Brown donned a headdress and sat for pictures with local dignitaries. But the move might have been a strategic one because the event not only allowed the champion to affirm his Indian identity, but it also provided Brown the opportunity to symbolically, dramatically, and publicly embrace the Indigenous community from which he hailed. Upon leaving the office, Brown was whisked to the state assembly where he witnessed the oration of a joint resolution that read in part:

Whereas, this strong-hearted son of enduring spirit, the very embodiment of all those qualities which have made these Indian runners of the trails and hills an heroic part of our glamorous history, deserves the friendliest of greetings from this general assembly for thus bringing to Rhode Island...this high honor, with its placing at the assembly of the nations at the next Olympics.⁴²⁷

With the conclusion of the reading, lawmakers stood and—according to one reporter—“paid the new Marathon champion one of the finest ovations ever tendered a visitor.”⁴²⁸

The extent to which Rhode Islanders celebrated their Olympic hopeful perplexed some observers as an astonished writer for the *Boston Traveler* exclaimed, “The state of Rhode Island has gone completely daffy over its new...champion, Ellison “Tarzan” Brown, the Narragansett Indian.”⁴²⁹ For their part, the Narragansetts were certainly pleased that the same officials they had spent the last fifty years haranguing for recognition, inclusion, and the return of sacred land, were suddenly “daffy” about one of their own. Just days after Brown’s reception, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the “Indian Day” legislation and allowed the date for the ceremony to be determined by the Narragansett. This dramatic reversal in official policy appeared to validate the promise that some tribal members had located in Brown, and as Chief

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Rhode Island General Assembly, *Joint Resolution 126 (H-979)*, Rhode Island State Archives.

⁴²⁸ *Providence Journal*, April 22, 1936, 9.

⁴²⁹ *Boston Traveler*, April 28, 1936, 14.

Peckham explained, the tribe decided to hold the celebration on the third Monday in April because “Tarzan had won the marathon on that day.”⁴³⁰ Hence, it appeared—for the moment at least—that although it was Brown who had endured to win the twenty-six-mile grind, it was the Narragansetts who had truly persevered because the tribe finally won public recognition.

However, the holiday was not the only redresses earned by way of the athleticism of the Indian runner and the obstinacy of his Indigenous supporters because Rhode Island lawmakers contemporaneously debated a bill granting the Narragansetts clear title to a two-acre plot whereupon laid a historic Indian church and tribal burial ground. Similarly, just two months after Brown’s victory, a replica of a traditional “Indian Village” was opened in Rhode Island’s Goddard Park to much acclaim. Governor Theodore Francis Green declared that the village “would represent a bond between the red man and the white man as long as it stands, and I think it will stand for a long time.”⁴³¹ The exhibit, along with the church bill and state holiday, helped to relocate the Narragansetts—however briefly—from obscurity to a place of social, political, and economic relevance.

This advancement was only possible because the celebration of Brown by white citizens did not upset well-established social and racial ideologies because, as Deloria explains, the success of Indigenous athletes could be understood as the byproduct of a primitive physicality and evidence of Indian difference.⁴³² Observations made by Roger Williams almost three-hundred years earlier appeared to affirm the seemingly natural ability of Narragansett runners. “They are generally quick on foot,” wrote Williams, “brought up from the breasts to running . . . I have knowne [sic] many of them run betweene [sic] fourscore and a hundred miles in a

⁴³⁰ *Westerly Sun*, April 26, 1936, 13.

⁴³¹ *Providence Journal*, August 9, 1936, 3.

⁴³² Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected*, 122.

Summers [sic] day.”⁴³³ The joint resolution issued by the state assembly in 1936 referenced the assumed historic qualities of “Indian runners.” But, while Rhode Islanders celebrated Brown’s supposed natural ability, they also negated all of the toil, sweat, and determination that had helped to make him victorious.

O’Brien argues that in the minds of many New Englanders, “Indian peoples became forever ancient—mired in the static past” and “deemed inauthentic if they did not comply with the expectation that they be persistently ancient.”⁴³⁴ Many white spectators merely embraced Brown as a caricature of an Indigenous past, a Wildman who emerged from the woods with a natural and raw talent, or as Derderian observes, “It was expected that he [Brown] could run—he was an Indian...if he succeeded it was because he did what his handlers prepared him to do, like a thoroughbred stallion.”⁴³⁵ By defining Brown’s success as wild, natural, and savage Euro-Americans affirmed their place atop New England’s social hierarchy. “The superiority of the ‘civilized,’ explains the anthropologist Pauline Turner Strong, “as well as their claim to legitimate power rests on dominating the natural, controlling the wild, subjugating the savage.”⁴³⁶ Therefore, while Brown’s athletic feats were something to be marveled at, many white Rhode Islanders ultimately construed that the runner’s success was indicative of innate racial, social, and physical difference. Instead of challenging existing ideologies, Brown’s success served as evidence of the natural inferiority of Indigenous peoples. Hence, the runner’s accomplishments could be framed as natural and primitive, and in no way emblematic of the industriousness or continued relevance of Indigenous persons, or a challenge to the privileged

⁴³³ Willaims *A Key*, 71.

⁴³⁴ O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 4.

⁴³⁵ Derderian, *Boston Marathon*, 152.

⁴³⁶ Pauline Turner Strong, *American Indians and the American Imaginary*, 31.

and seemingly natural superiority of white Rhode Islander's and their "verifiable" claims to the region.

Moreover, public acknowledgment of the tribe appeared to be of little consequence to many non-Indians because the Narragansetts, who were relatively small in number, did not receive any monetary recompense. In fact, the Indians seemed to gain nothing tangible from recognition, save a two-acre plot that was already under the control of the tribe. Therefore, when Arthur Duffy, the state's commissioner of the Amateur Athletic Union, advocated that "the City of Providence and the State of Rhode Island get behind this boy" because, "when he wins the marathon it will mean not only a great victory for Uncle Sam, but for Rhode Island," he expressed the promise that many of the state's white citizens had envisioned in Brown as they exhorted the Indian runner without questioning the veracity of their own exclusionary social, racial, and economic policies.⁴³⁷

However, because Brown did not return from Germany an Olympic champion as so many had hoped, the enthusiasm that had carried the Indian runner across the ocean quickly dissipated. Although there are many explanations—some quite spectacular—for Brown's failure to secure a victory in Berlin, the fact is, that for the first time in his career, Brown failed to finish a race.⁴³⁸

The parallels between the experience of the Indian and that of Sohn Kee Chung—the man who won the Olympic marathon in 1936—were quite remarkable because, like Brown, Chung represented two nations because the Korean runner was compelled to compete using the Japanese alias Kitei Son and under the auspices of the Japanese flag. Like Brown, Chung had hoped that his participation would lead to greater awareness about the plight of his people and,

⁴³⁷ *Providence Journal*, May 3, 1936, 25.

⁴³⁸ Explanations range wildly. Some contend that the runner suffered from cramps, while others claim that Brown's loss resulted from barroom brawl the day before the race. See Hopkins, Ward, and Derderian.

while on the podium, the Korean victor lowered his head in defiance when officials raised the Japanese flag and played that country's national anthem.⁴³⁹ We can only speculate what Brown might have done had he won the race. Would he have cried out "we done it" as he did in Boston? Would he have donned a headdress as he had at the Governor's office? Or would he have hung his head in shame like Chung? Irrespective of what the runner might have done, it is likely that had he won, Brown would have returned home a champion on paper but to the same social, political, and economic realities that greeted him as an also-ran. In fact, Brown's post-Olympic experience resembled that of Owens because, like the black champion, the Indian also struggled to find employment and relevancy in a society still clinging to antiquated social and racial ideals.

Indeed, even before Brown's second win in Boston, Rhode Island's leaders had already returned to the pre-tercentennial practice of ignoring and marginalizing the state's Indigenous population. For example, the resolution passed by the state assembly in 1939 recognizing Brown's latest victory constituted the first and final time lawmakers officially acknowledged anyone from the Narragansett community since the runner returned home from Berlin and until tribal members were granted suffrage by the state in 1950. The neglect experienced by Brown during the years bookended by his two wins in Boston was emblematic of the challenges faced by a people deemed to be of little or no consequence by state leaders. For example, when Brown won the marathon in 1939, his top priority was to seek opportunities for employment. While discussing his latest world record-setting victory with an interviewer, the runner chided, "I get nothing but medals, and you can't eat those."⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, when observing all the pageantry associated with his win, Brown stated: "Really fellows [sic], I like all this, but a job would be so

⁴³⁹ Lovett, *Olympic Marathon*, 51.

⁴⁴⁰ Cited in Ward, *Ellison "Tarzan" Brown*, 211.

much nicer.”⁴⁴¹ The fact that someone Rhode Islanders ardently celebrated just a few years earlier had such difficulty securing employment was not only emblematic of the ephemeral nature of celebrity, but also of the systemic challenges faced by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Those people from traditionally marginalized groups who hoped that athletic success might transcend and possibly challenge enduring racial and social ideologies were mostly disappointed because the recognition and praise won by Owens, Louis, and Brown did not result in the redemption of their communities. In fact, the public admiration tendered to these athletes did little to improve their plights because not only did their fame fail to elicit fortune but it also did not afford the former athletes with greater opportunities for employment once their celebrity waned.

Hence, after the spectacle of the tercentennial and the excitement of the Olympics faded, Rhode Islanders quickly returned to the standard policy of neglecting and marginalizing the state’s Indigenous population. However, a precedent had been set and the recognition and property exacted by tribal members between 1935 and 1936, would figure prominently in the forceful demands made by future generations of Narragansett leaders.⁴⁴² In what would prove to be the paper’s final issue, the editors of the *Dawn* reflected on what the past year had meant to the Narragansetts:

In the many programs of the year, only a pleasant, bright and cheerful side of the Narragansett have been portrayed. Always the Indian is giving up to the paleface . . . We have given what we had to give in the past. In the present we gave of our

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 209.

⁴⁴² In 1975, the Narragansett sued the state of Rhode Island for the return of land that the Indians claimed had been taken illegally. Because state leaders openly acknowledged the existence of the tribe in the 1930s, it could no longer be claimed that the Narragansett ceased to exist following detribalization. A settlement was reached in 1978 that saw the return of 1,200 acres to the tribe.

members for entertainment . . . Our reward is—Rhode Island knows now—The NARRAGANSETT TRIBE STILL EXISTS!⁴⁴³

Indeed, by publicly celebrating Brown's success and participating in the pageantry of the tercentennial, tribal members not only affirmed the persistence of their community, but these efforts also helped to fashion a future in which the Indians and their posterity could demand redress as the regions original and rightful inhabitants.

The Narragansett journalist John Christian Hopkins eloquently recounted Brown's achievements in a poem when he stated, "a man climbed Heartbreak Hill, a legend descended the other side."⁴⁴⁴ However, modern interpretations of that legend merit some revision because the runner not only contributed to Narragansett lore, but Brown's accomplishments also helped to make public acknowledgment of the tribe's communal identity a reality. Therefore, while it was a man who climbed Heartbreak Hill, it was an Indian nation that descended the other side.

The headline for a short two paragraph story found in the *New York Times* on 24 August 1975 read: Ellison (Tarzan) Brown, 61, Marathon Runner, Is Dead.⁴⁴⁵ Although the caption appeared to communicate all of the pertinent information, it was the article's first line that revealed Ellison Brown's real legacy. Because, after communicating the name and hometown of the deceased and before listing the runner's athletic accomplishments, the paper identified Brown—foremost—as a "Narragansett Indian." During the same year that Brown passed away, the community his athleticism helped to preserve once again sued the state of Rhode Island for the return of ancestral lands. But now—primarily due to the recognition afforded to Brown and the Narragansetts in 1936—lawmakers could no longer claim that the Indians had been

⁴⁴³ Redwing and Hazard, "Narragansett Dawn," Vol.2, No. 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Senier, ed; *Dawnland Voices*, 533.

⁴⁴⁵ "Ellison (Tarzan) Brown, 61, Marathon Runner, Is Dead," *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1957.

disbanded in 1880. In fact, although the Narragansetts officially obtained the land upon which the now federally recognized tribe has built its community longhouse, administration offices, health center, police and environmental enforcement offices, Church, and powwow grounds in a settlement with state officials in 1978, this land and the recognition it portended was really won in 1936, on a hill in Boston.

Chapter 5 – The *Dawn*

In 1935, just months before Ellison “Tarzan” Brown’s dash up heartbreak hill, James F. Rockett—Rhode Island’s director of education—penned a terse reply to an inquiry he received about the inclusion of Native Americans in the state’s official curriculum. The director wrote, “We have made no recommendation of study of the American Indians . . . we believe . . . Indians . . . contributed very little indeed to American civilization . . . we would wish in Rhode Island to relegate the Indian interest to a matter of a passing episode.”⁴⁴⁶ Rockett’s response was emblematic of an enduring narrative—discussed in previous chapters—that professed an early demise of the region’s indigenous population and defined succeeding generations of Indians as illegitimate. Hence, the director interpreted Native peoples, both past and present, as inconsequential.

However, the pomp and pageantry associated with the celebration of Rhode Island’s tercentenary in 1936 created opportunities for tribal leaders to challenge the narrative of demise and to proclaim the continuance of their community. Philip J. Deloria observes that by the twentieth century some Indian peoples recognized “that political and legal struggles are tightly linked to the ideologies and images—the expectations—that non-Indians have built around Native people.”⁴⁴⁷ The experience of detribalization left many Narragansetts with a unique appreciation for the sway and utility of public perception. Thus, by the 1930s, some Narragansetts sought to express their indigeneity according to the social and racial constructs

⁴⁴⁶ Princess Redwing and Ernest Hazard, “The Narragansett Dawn,” Special Collections Publications (Miscellaneous), paper 5, accessed June 28, 2017, http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/sc_pubs/5.

⁴⁴⁷ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected*, 104.

established and professed by non-Indians.⁴⁴⁸ However, in the process of reimagining and reasserting their indigeneity, many Narragansetts not only considered and utilized the parameters of authenticity enshrined within the larger society, but certain tribal members also internalized and perpetuated these themes. For example, in response to Rockett's assertions, Princess Redwing wrote, "To-day the brown skinned, blackeyed, straight haired tall and fiery spirited man, whom R.I. has done her best to extinguish, still lives, and the blood of his forefathers, in many places, has not been tainted with either white or black bloods."⁴⁴⁹ In attempting to certify the indigeneity of the Narragansetts, Redwing appealed to the same tropes—blood quantum and appearance—previously used to invalidate the tribal community. It appears then that race—a characteristic seldom employed by previous generations of Narragansetts—was now a paramount identifier and communicator of authenticity even among the Indians. This chapter examines the *Narragansett Dawn*—a monthly newsletter published by tribal members and distributed to audiences around the world between 1935 and 1936—to assess how the Narragansetts used the language of authenticity established by local, state, and federal officials to reassert a public identity.

The *Narragansett Dawn* was intended, as its editors explained, to "open for our public of all races, the great unwritten book of the Narragansett, sent down from father to son, portraying from time to time, many folk laws, ideals, principles, and traditions which we hold as sacred

⁴⁴⁸ Throughout this work I have often used the qualifiers of certain, many, and some while discussing fractions within the Narragansett community. At other times—when evidence of fractional difference was less clear—I simply referred to the Narragansetts without employing any qualifiers. However, in such cases I do not mean to suggest the Narragansetts were monolithic. Just that the conceptualizations and interpretations of different fractions were not readily discernable. The references made to the Narragansetts throughout most of this chapter refer primarily to the faction that was incorporated by the state of Rhode Island on 3 December 1934.

⁴⁴⁹ Redwing and Hazard, "Narragansett Dawn," Vol.1, No. 9.

heritage.”⁴⁵⁰ By opening for public display, the great book passed on through generations the creators of the *Dawn* appealed to a social and cultural tradition that remained unbroken by the exigencies of official detribalization. Although seemingly innocuous, the *Dawn* was nothing less than the emphatic reclamation of an Indigenous identity by a people who were not just written off, but also quite literally, written out of history. Moreover, in the paper’s inaugural issue the editors observed that “for nearly sixty years the Narragansett Spirit has laid dormant,” while state and federal officials “recorded the tribe as extinguished,” but “all the recording in the country could not change the blood or wipe it out.”⁴⁵¹ It is clear that from its conception the *Dawn* was a medium through which the Narragansetts would challenge longstanding misconceptions.

In 1936, more than fifty years after state officials emphatically determined that the Narragansetts were extinct, Rhode Islanders prepared to commemorate their three-hundredth year. But while they planned their celebrations the state’s white citizenry was forced to contend with the fact that Native Americans were a central and immutable part of Rhode Island’s history. Chapter 3 describes how Rhode Islanders were eager to appropriate the athleticism of Ellison Brown in hopes of bringing fame to the state in its banner year. Similarly, the spectacle associated with the tercentenary provided opportunities for tribal members to participate in the pageantry as organizers looked to authenticate their events with the participation of *real*—or at least real-looking—Indians. But the inclusion of Narragansetts in the parades, plays, reenactments, and dedications of 1936 was—for the most part—a perfunctory exercise and by no means a certification of the authenticity of the Indians or their community. But while tribal members donned their regalia, secured bows to their backs, and grabbed their drums to *play*

⁴⁵⁰ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 1.

⁴⁵¹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 1.

Indian, they necessarily subverted the prevailing historical narrative because they exposed all who viewed these exhibitions to the plain fact that all of Rhode Island's Indians were not extinct. Indeed, the Narragansetts who marched down Main Street and recited soliloquies intended to communicate to their audiences that they were not merely playing Indian.

In preparation for a major parade staged during the tercentenary celebration, Narragansett leaders designed and constructed an extravagant seventy-two-foot long parade float. According to the *Dawn*, the float was an artistic and technical marvel intended to re-create the arrival of Roger Williams in Narragansett territory:

It [the float] carried the sign "Netop," meaning "Friend" in the Narragansett tongue.... Upon the hood, protruded a platform on which was built an Indian village, where reclined the aged Narragansetts and small children . . . On the shoreline stood Canonicus and Miantonomi, with outstretched hands towards Roger Williams rocking in the morning breeze on the water . . . The Indians were of the same blood of those who did live on these shores in 1636. Twenty-nine of the present Narragansett Tribe were there in the garb of their ancestors, and holding ancient weapons and peace pipe.⁴⁵²

Moreover, the *Dawn* described the parade as “one like Providence had never seen before” and recalled that the Indians strutted to “a loud applause all along the line of march, through the streets of Providence.”⁴⁵³ The utility of such a spectacle for a people deemed non-existent was evident because—although the recreation constituted an ode to the past—it was peopled by those living in the present. The obvious message that the Indians literally paraded through the streets was that the Narragansetts still existed. Hence, a notable percentage of the tribe's overall population marched alongside the float. However, the underlying message associated with the spectacle was much more convoluted. While the Indians paraded through the streets of

⁴⁵² Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 9.

⁴⁵³ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 9.

Providence in their ceremonial garb, they recalled a time when the region's white and Indigenous populations communed peacefully as coequals. The participants almost certainly hoped to communicate to their white audience that this mutually beneficial relationship did not have to be relegated to the past. But the expression and agency of the Narragansetts was curtailed by the expectations of their non-Indigenous audience because for tribal members to participate in the parade they needed to look and act in accordance with well-established stereotypes. The caricature of the buckskin-wearing and tomahawk carrying *redskin* was delimiting and obscured the fact that those who marched in the parade were the same people who proclaimed the perseverance of the Narragansetts as a tribe. Deloria posits that many non-Indians harbored the common expectation "that Indian people would remain back with Columbus, locked in history, memory, and representation, and excluded from a new social and political world."⁴⁵⁴ Hence, the regalia, bows, and drums donned by the Indians hid more than just their identities because these accouterments of a bygone era also helped to dehumanize the performers. But such was the price of inclusion, and the Narragansetts who participated in the spectacle made a strategic decision. "In these great celebrations by white Rhode Island," explained the *Dawn's* editors, "Narragansetts have been called upon to do their part from the days of Canonicus...In the long run—'giving' brings a reward."⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, no matter their expectations, some in the audience saw beyond the costumes, and although the Indians they observed might have looked like they were from a different era they most certainly were not. And this fact was undeniable no matter what the audience believed about the current condition of the Narragansetts.

⁴⁵⁴ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected*, 103.

⁴⁵⁵ Redwing and Hazard, "Narragansett Dawn," Vol.1, No. 9.

The opportunities for inclusion afforded to the Narragansetts during the celebration of the tercentenary accompanied a general shift in federal policy exemplified by the appointment of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933 and the passage of the Wheeler-Howard bill—also known as the Indian Reorganization Act or IRA—in 1934. Leaders among the Narragansetts were well aware of the opportunity portended in these developments publishing in the *Dawn* that “We have a real friend of our race in Commissioner Collier,” and that “Many features of the Act [IRA] are good...Wisely administered...it may result in much good to the Indians who may elect to come under its provisions.”⁴⁵⁶ According to Donald L. Parman, Collier rejected the philosophy of forced assimilation and instead emphasized the importance of preserving and renewing Indigenous heritage whenever possible. The new director “demanded that Indians be allowed to reorganize their tribal governments,” writes Parman, “and...take an active role in the administration of reservation affairs.”⁴⁵⁷ Although many criticized Collier’s approach as retrogressive charging the commissioner with “turning the clock back on Indian advancement,” scholars such as D’Arcy McNickle show that Collier viewed Indian societies not as fossilized and frozen in the past but as “assimilative, while yet faithful to...ancient values.”⁴⁵⁸ Regardless of how others interpreted Collier’s policies, the utility of this philosophical shift and the legislation it helped to inspire was quickly embraced by many within the Narragansett community who had long petitioned Washington for recognition and redress. Collier and the IRA breathed new life into Narragansetts’ hopes for a new deal. The optimism that accompanied this shift in federal policy was expressed in the first issue of the *Dawn* when editors explained that

⁴⁵⁶ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 10. And Vol. 1, No. 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Donald L. Parman, *The Navajos And The New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 30.

⁴⁵⁸ D’Arcy McNickle, “The Indian New Deal as Mirror of the Future,” in *Major Problems in American Indian History*, ed. Albert L. Hurtado and Peter Iverson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 416.

“We have called this monthly booklet “the Narragansett Dawn” because we are watching for the “sunrise of better times” in the “New Deal” with our fellow countrymen.”⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, after what the *Dawn* called a long night, the Narragansetts were among the first Indigenous peoples to seek reorganization under the new legislation holding their inaugural meeting on December 4, 1934, less than five months after the passage of the IRA.

Those within the Narragansett community who looked to Washington for the sunrise of better times understood that the new commissioner, as Parman observes, “believed very strongly that whatever remained of Indian heritage must be preserved and renewed if at all possible.”⁴⁶⁰ It is no coincidence then that the majority of the articles published in the *Dawn* focused on the preservation and continuance of Narragansett folkways. But the stories about traditional recipes and medicines and the lessons about the tribe’s history and language were not solely or even primarily designed for an Indian audience. In fact, a preponderance of the newsletters were delivered to non-Indian peoples and institutions including the many copies provided to individual libraries and universities free of charge. Indeed, the wide distribution of the *Dawn* was in keeping with the editors’ stated objective to open to the public the great book of the Narragansetts. Therefore, the newsletter was not only intended to teach local Indians but also, and perhaps more purposefully, the *Dawn* constituted an attempt to reclaim and reassert the indigeneity of the Narragansetts publically.

But, as stated earlier, while the Narragansetts worked to reestablish and legitimize their public identity, they were compelled to operate within the confines of the general public’s common expectations. Hence the *Dawn*’s contributors often appropriated the language of

⁴⁵⁹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 1.

⁴⁶⁰ Parman, *Navajos and New Deal*, 30.

authenticity established and certified by those outside of their community. For example, in its December issue of 1935, the *Dawn* published a story written by Chief Pine Tree titled “A Feast For An Indian Scout.” In the story, the author advises readers that “If you are on an all-day fishing trip be sure to carry along some potatoes and Indian corn meal.”⁴⁶¹ Such preparations will allow the “scout,” after he has “caught a good mess of trout,” to “build a campfire on a sunny side hill.” Prepare his corn cakes on birch bark and place his potatoes and fish—which were to be wrapped in green leaves—under the coals. While his meal is cooking the scout can “lie down and rest for an hour.” Although seemingly innocuous and perhaps even practical, this story must be placed into context. The editors of the *Dawn* knew that the great majority of their readers would never use the techniques outlined in the article. The story’s informative value rested not in what it instructed but in what it implied. By suggesting that—in the midst of a crushing depression—certain Narragansett scouts could blissfully spend all day on a fishing trip punctuated with a long nap, the *Dawn* made use of widely accepted stereotypes that claimed Native peoples were wild, carefree, and non-industrious. Furthermore, the instructions about how to prepare the meal using just the implements provided by nature communicated an understanding of traditional ways that could have only been gained from a strong connection to the past. Thus, the story intended to certify not only the scout’s Indigenous authenticity but also that of the greater Narragansett community. As Fredrick E. Hoxie explains, “Most Americans instinctively view Indians as people of the past.”⁴⁶² The editors of the *Dawn* were also keen to exploit this social expectation however antiquated.

⁴⁶¹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 8.

⁴⁶² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 2.

Although it may seem counterintuitive that members of an Indigenous community would employ stereotypes that many people regarded as degrading and restrictive to communicate their Indianness, one must only examine the rancor that permeated interactions between the state of Rhode Island the Narragansetts over the preceding sixty years to truly appreciate that tribe's unique disposition. When state administrators moved to detribalize the Narragansetts they did so by aggressively arguing that the *so called* descendants of this once prominent tribe—whose centrality in Rhode Island's establishment was unquestionable—were in fact inauthentic imitators who, as the state claimed, “simply took the name of this once great tribe.”⁴⁶³ As discussed in previous chapters, Rhode Islanders based their analysis and dismissal of the remaining Narragansetts almost exclusively upon the appearance of the Natives. Many non-Indians argued that all of the real Indians must have died out because all that remained of the tribe was a “cluster of negroes or dusky complexioned persons.” Moreover, some of the state's white citizens questioned the authenticity of the Narragansetts because the Natives did not resemble the “real Indians” Rhode Islanders saw when attended William Cody's Wild West shows which visited the state no less than eighteen times between 1874 and detribalization in 1881. It was true that many Narragansetts did not resemble the Lakota heavily featured in Cody's shows. But aside from the fact that they were not Lakota, two and a half centuries of close cross-cultural interactions meant that the Narragansetts maintained a long history of intermarriage, a reality seldom experienced by tribes living among the isolating vastness of the

⁴⁶³ “The Narragansett Indians Supreme Court Opinion 1898,” Rhode Island Department of State, accessed October 21, 2016.

[file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Teacher/Downloads/The%20Narragansett%20Indians%20Supreme%20Court%20Opinion%201898%20(1).pdf)

American West.⁴⁶⁴ But, as explained in chapter 2, the idea that intermarriage rendered the descendants of these unions as less authentic was originally proposed by non-Indians. However, in an effort to reclaim their identity, many within the Narragansett community appropriated and internalized the measures of Indigenous authenticity fabricated and propagated by their white neighbors. For example, the Narragansett historian Ella Wilcox Sekatau explains that some Narragansetts came to see the children resulting from cross-cultural relationships as less authentic, especially those resulting from an admixture with African blood because such unions were interpreted as contributing to a “loss of Indianness.”⁴⁶⁵

An article published by the *Dawn* in April of 1936 clearly illustrates how some Narragansetts attempted to communicate the authenticity of their community by appealing to popular conceptualizations about race. “The world has forgotten,” wrote a Narragansett historian, “that we could marry and run out it time, strange bloods that once invaded our tribe.”⁴⁶⁶ The claim constituted a stark departure from earlier appraisals because—as discussed in Chapter 2—Narragansett leaders asserted previously that one drop of Indigenous blood certified them as Indians.⁴⁶⁷ However, the intervening decades—ones that included detribalization and marginalization—taught many within the Narragansett community that they were not—at least in the public sphere—the only arbitrators of their community’s parameters. In describing how the Narragansetts were able to “run out...strange bloods,” the historian invoked social and racial modalities readily understood by the great majority of the *Dawn*’s readers. It was by such means

⁴⁶⁴ I do not mean to suggest that Indigenous peoples residing primarily in the American West were isolated from each other or the outside world. But that those Native peoples living West of the Mississippi had markedly less frequent and not as long lasting associations with peoples of European and African descent.

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in Geake, *A History of the Narragansett*, 63.

⁴⁶⁶ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 12.

⁴⁶⁷ See quote in Chapter two

that some Narragansetts appropriated the language of authenticity established by non-Indians. Moreover, to further certify the Indigeneity of the tribal members, the author suggested that any observer who looked at “our very faces, features, eyes, hair and physics [*sic*]” will conclude that the Narragansetts were Indians. The historian’s appeal to appearance was also in keeping with mainstream ideals because, as explained earlier, many white Rhode Islanders held certain expectations about the way Indians should look.⁴⁶⁸ The importance the Indians assigned to appearance was further communicated in another issue of the *Dawn* that celebrated the arrival of twenty-nine “golden brown, black-eyed, straight haired Indian babies born into our tribe.” Although the births, which marked the resurgence of a community that had previously teetered on the brink of numerical extinction, certainly gave cause for merriment, the editors of the *Dawn* intended to communicate more than just a surge in population. They also hoped to convey their authenticity as Indian peoples who produced “golden brown and straight haired” children.

By choosing to define their community per widely accepted social and racial ideals, Narragansett leaders invoked what the scholar Greta Snyder Fowler termed a monovalent form of recognition. Fowler explains that monovalent recognition movements were delimiting because they produced “fixed conceptions of collective identities” in which certain—often stereotypical—characteristics “are conceived of as essential or authentic.”⁴⁶⁹ Scholars have long lamented this type of essentialism not only because of its tendency to repress or exclude certain members of the community who failed to possess or display whatever characteristics were deemed essential or authentic, but also because it reinforced constraining stereotypes and

⁴⁶⁸ Although it is beyond the scope of this project, understanding the ramifications associated with shifting ideals of authenticity within the Narragansett community remains an intriguing yet complex endeavor.

⁴⁶⁹ Greta Snyder Fowler, “Multivalent Recognition: Between Fixity and Fluidity in Identity Politics.” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 2012), pp 250.

allowed individuals from outside the community to act as arbitrators. However, the Narragansetts did not just simply placate white audiences with their dress, drums, and appeals to racial purity. On the contrary—many tribal members also viewed these acts as symbols of authenticity. Christine N. Reiser explains that during the early twentieth-century white audiences throughout New England expected widely accepted symbols of indigeneity to figure “prominently in historical pageants.”⁴⁷⁰ Hence, Native communities were encouraged to supplement traditional practices and iconography with that “of other Native groups, particularly those groups of the Plains whose traits had come to symbolize Indian-ness in the non-native public.”⁴⁷¹

A recollection printed in the *Dawn* illustrates the change experienced by many within the Narragansett community once certain tribal members adopted pan-Indian symbols of Indigeneity. In an article published in September of 1935, Cassuis A. Champlin—president of the Narragansett tribal council—recalled attending an annual August Meeting as a youth. Champlin remembered that “Indian costumes and war bonnets were not in vogue then, for everybody was doing his best to apt the white race in style and dress...but the August Meeting of to-day seems somewhat different, as though the cycle of time had lifted us up and dropped us in new surroundings.”⁴⁷² Champlin was born in 1894, and the meeting he described most likely took place sometime around the turn of the century. But as Reiser shows, by 1925 the annual August Meeting had transformed. Through the inclusion of pan-Indian style dress and performances, “the Narragansetts’ annual August Meeting, was expanded even further into a dramatic display of indigeneity” in which tribal members intended to make clear their

⁴⁷⁰ Christine N. Reiser, “Materializing Community: The Intersections of Pageantry, Material Culture and Indigeneity in Early 20th-Century New England,” *Material Culture Review*, Vol. 69. Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/MCR/article/view/18146/19522>

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.,

⁴⁷² Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 5.

“continuing links to heritage and community.”⁴⁷³ Two images Boissevain included in her work on the Narragansetts attested to the change described by Champlin. A picture of Mary A. Secatur Perry taken sometime in the late nineteenth-century showed the Narragansett woman fashioned in the clothing and wearing her hair in a style similar to that of Euro-American women. The image is a stark contrast to another picture included in the book of Philip Peckham. The photograph of the chief taken in 1934 showed Peckham adorned in ceremonial regalia complete with a Western-style headdress. The two images were emblematic of a change that saw certain members of the Narragansett community appropriate pan-Indian imagery and symbolism to communicate their identity as Indigenous peoples.

Sometime before the printing of its May issue in 1936, the editors of the *Dawn* received a letter from “a modern lady . . . criticizing [*sic*] the use of ceremonial clothes by the descendants of Indians.”⁴⁷⁴ The response printed by the editors revealed not only why some Narragansetts sought to employ the symbols of Indigeneity accepted by Euro-Americans, but also how the expectations of non-Indians were appropriated and authenticated by the Indians themselves. Aside from the fact that the editors found the beadwork that adorned ceremonial clothes a “pleasant sight,” the authors explained that, “The American public still lores [*sic*] Indian ceremonial clothes and ask that we shall wear them to their ceremonies.”⁴⁷⁵ By donning their buckskins and war bonnets, leaders within the Narragansett community were quite simply playing Indian for their white audiences. But the regalia worn by tribal members did more than just entertain because it also helped to authenticate a population many had long thought to be extinct. For many Rhode Islanders, the Narragansetts were a people of the past, and as such,

⁴⁷³ Reiser, “Materializing Community,” 45.

⁴⁷⁴ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.2, No. 1.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

modern incarnations of the Indians were deemed to be imitative. The letter written by the “modern lady” was indicative of these conceptualizations because the author referred to the people asserting Narragansett ancestry as “descendants of Indians” and not Indians in their own right. The ceremonial dress worn by tribal members helped non-Indians clear this ideological hurdle and the Narragansetts were keen to exploit this reality. However, some factions within the Narragansett community objected to the appropriation of popular Indigenous iconography. In fact, the tribal elder Evangeline Hankinson recalled that her father Thomas Babcock once explained why their family did not dress like some of the other Indians or participate in certain ceremonial dances at the August Meeting. Babcock told his daughter, “That is not part of our history . . . that is not who we are.”⁴⁷⁶ Babcock was referencing the western inspired costumes that by the middle of the twentieth-century remained a mainstay at local powwows.

As stated, certain Narragansetts did not just co-opt the identifiers of Indigeneity espoused by Euro-Americans, because—in time—some tribal leaders internalized these symbols as authentic harbingers of Indigeneity. For example, in their response to the modern lady, the editors of the *Dawn* explained that their regalia was more than just decorative because “all of the symbols upon our clothes have a meaning.”⁴⁷⁷ The editors continued to explain the importance of teaching their children the significances of the ceremonial dress: “Each true Indian mother gives her son or daughter the Indian signs of life. She teaches him the things hidden in her heart, which time cannot wipe out, or civilization change.”⁴⁷⁸ However, as revealed by Champlin’s early recollection of the August Meeting and Babcock’s disinterest in the practice, dressing in regalia was a more modern ritual. Therefore, all of the lessons and meaning that emblazoned ceremonial

⁴⁷⁶ Hankinson Evangeline, Interview conducted by the author, October 10, 2017

⁴⁷⁷ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.2, No. 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.,

outfits were somehow passed through the generations even when many Narragansetts had forgone their “Indian costumes” for the dress and style of the “white race.” The fact that in their response, the editors of the *Dawn* equated ceremonial dress with tradition and Identity reveals how some Indians began to internalize and certify common symbols of Indigeneity.

When the Narragansetts began to incorporate the general pan-Indian iconography they also help to legitimate these symbols as identifiers of authenticity. Hence, certain tribal members were complicit in defining and perpetuating restrictive interpretations of Indigeneity. But in the 1930s Narragansett leaders were forced to operate within the confines of what Fowler terms “structural prerequisites” because Rhode Islanders—who had spent decades professing the extinction of the state’s Indigenous population—only accepted a narrow monovalent form of indigeneity as authentic. Thus, the Narragansetts needed to don their war bonnets, bang on their tom-toms, and play Indian for the white mainstream to recognize them as Indians. But even as tribal members performed in the roles of a bygone era, they hoped to communicate to their non-Indigenous audiences that the Narragansetts were far from gone.

But the Narragansetts did not only change their attire when they adapted to and employed more general conceptualizations about the identifiers of authenticity because—in an attempt to both certify their Indigeneity and prove the continued relevance of their community—tribal members also appealed to historic and popular constructions about the bellicosity of Indigenous peoples. The reenacted struggles Rhode Islanders witnessed at Cody’s shows as well as the fictional contest they saw on movie screens throughout the opening decades of the twentieth-century helped to frame Indian peoples as “war-whooping” savages in the eyes of the general public.⁴⁷⁹ Although the Narragansetts had been militarily subdued long ago, the massacre of

⁴⁷⁹ Deloria *Indians in Unexpected*, 105.

Lakota at Wounded Knee, which Deloria called “cross-tribal and cross-cultural milepost,” was not yet fifty years past.⁴⁸⁰ “For non-Indian Americans,” writes Deloria, “the possibility of nineteenth-century Indian violence existed before Wounded Knee; afterward, it became a thing of representation, perfect for twentieth-century movies and books.”⁴⁸¹ As Euro-Americans became more accustomed to seeing Indians depicted as violent and warlike, the symbols of war—hatchets, bows and arrows—came to be identifiers of authenticity. This was not because non-Indians feared the bellicosity of Indigenous peoples in the twentieth-century, but that those Indians who rode bareback and took scalps in fictionalized resistance seemed more authentic than the Natives who filed lawsuits in actual acts of resistance. Deloria observes that while “most Americans expected that Indian people had been pacified, they also came to expect images of nineteenth-century Indian violence on the silver screen.”⁴⁸² Because modern acts of resistance by Indigenous peoples did not match what Euro-Americans saw in theaters, to many non-Natives “contemporary Indian people seemed like pathetic anachronisms.”⁴⁸³ Thus, when certain Narragansetts took their bows, clubs, and hatchets in hand they clutched more than just these instruments of war, because they also affirmed their connections to a violent, warlike, and supposedly more authentic past. An editorial published in the *Dawn* explicitly recalled these ties to bellicosity. “We would rather . . . draw a picture, than draw a trigger . . . ‘truck’ than dance a war dance . . . gather around a cozy fireplace, rather than a council fire of death.”⁴⁸⁴ Although they were ultimately avowing violence, the editors still drew upon the widely accepted and

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.,

⁴⁸² Deloria *Indians in Unexpected*, 107.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.,

⁴⁸⁴ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 10.

apocryphal paradigm proclaiming the violent nature Indigenous peoples to assert their authenticity as people who could still perform war dances and build council fires of death.

Some Narragansett leaders also employed this ideal of Indigenous bellicosity to affirm both the contributions and continued relevance of their community. “Narragansetts love their state and the ideals for which it stands,” wrote the *Dawn*’s editors, “when her [Rhode Island] liberty was at stake, Narragansetts fought.”⁴⁸⁵ The editors proceeded to list the names and ranks of Narragansetts who had served in all of the wars fought by colonial and Euro-Americans beginning with what has come to be known as the French and Indian War in 1754. The authors even noted those who had “made the supreme sacrifice for liberty and honor of their homeland.”⁴⁸⁶ By recounting the martial contributions made by tribal members, Narragansett leaders made use of delimiting serotypes to advocate not only for the public recognition of the sacrifices made by tribal members, but also for the acknowledgement that the Indians—and their supposed innate bellicosity—remained relevant in modern American society. For example, the editors claimed that the twenty-five names they listed were “just a few, just enough to show, we can give for war.” During a time of heightened international tensions, knowing that their neighbors—no matter how small their community—were willing to give for war must have been reassuring to some Euro-Americans. In reminding readers of their contributions, the Narragansetts appealed to the same hyper-patriotic milieu that had allowed for the inclusion and celebration of athletes drawn from traditionally marginalized communities. And as was true for those who believed that athletic achievements might lead to greater inclusion, so did some

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.,

⁴⁸⁶ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 10.

Narragansetts hope that the recognition of their “supreme sacrifice” would inspire Rhode Islanders to rethink how they interacted with their Indigenous neighbors.

For the Narragansetts’, participation in the pageantry of the tercentenary compelled tribal members to interpret limited roles that—because they were exclusively rooted in the past—often portrayed the Native performers as anachronistic. However, tribal leaders were also able to use the unique opportunities associated with 1936 to communicate the continued perseverance and relevance of their community. For example, on the fourth of July the Narragansetts staged an elaborate pageant that recalled “the Coming of Roger Williams to the Lodge of Canonicus.”⁴⁸⁷ Close to 140 Narragansetts participated in the performance. In adhering to the expectations of the general non-Indian public, tribal members reenacted scenes such as the purchase of Aquidneck Island, the defeat of King Phillip, and of course, Canonicus’ acceptance and support of Roger Williams. In fact, only two of the sixteen pages in the program dealt with events beyond 1880. But in these last pages the Narragansetts revealed the utility—and perhaps real intent—of their endeavor. It was here at the end of the program that the Indians may have hoped to leave their most important and lasting impression because the final pages of the program called for a parade. But unlike the time the Narragansetts marched through the streets of Providence, on this day when the Indians paraded past their audience they did so while *playing* themselves. The part of “Our College Lassie” was interpreted by Margret Carter a member of the Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Ki national academic honorary societies and student at Brown University in Providence. The part of “Our College Lad” was depicted by Harry Peckham who was then enrolled at Eastern Nazarene College in Wollaston Massachusetts. The part of “Our Dentist” was portrayed by Dr. U.T. Carter. The parts of “Our Business Man,” “Our Business Women,” “Our School Teacher,”

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol.2, No. 2.

“Our Stone Masons,” along with a multitude of other “Ours” also made their way through the procession. And of course, “Our Runner” was played by the marathon champion Ellison Brown. Because these Narragansetts essentially portrayed themselves they were really not *playing* anything. They were not dressing up. They were not pretending to be someone who lived hundreds of years ago. They were instead dramatically and emphatically asserting themselves as authentic and modern incarnations of Indigeneity. Thus the parade was nothing less than a direct assault on the apocryphal narrative—believed by many in attendance—that *real* Indians were forever ancient.

1936 proved to be a banner year not just for Rhode Island but also for the Narragansetts because the celebration of the state’s tercentenary not only allowed for, but authenticity also demanded, the inclusion of the area’s Native population. But whereas non-Indians mostly dictated the parameters of Indian inclusion, tribal members worked within prescribed structural prerequisites to not only subvert but to also openly challenge familiar expectations. The final line in the Fourth of July program revealed what the Narragansetts hoped to accomplish as they helped their white neighbors recall the days of Canonicus. The tribe’s elaborate pageant ended with the voice of a lone Indian simply stating that, “there is room, for white and red to live as brothers should.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.2, No. 2.

Conclusion – The Punchline

A story published in the *Dawn* in 1935 recalled the tale of a white man who wished “to buy the land of an old chief.” The man—no doubt aware of stereotypical depictions of Indians as drunkards—invited the sachem to his house to eat, drink, and discuss business. The “dinner was served in several courses and” with “drink each time.” The chief ate and drank so much that he was unable to certify the deal and “went home and said nothing.” The following day “the white man came by the Indian’s abode to talk business. The Indian ordered his squaw to serve dinner first. She served six courses but each was succotash. The white man wishing to be polite in order to keep the Indian in good humor, ate so many beans that he could not talk, so he went away. The Indian saved his land.”⁴⁸⁹

The story was allegoric and indicative of the transformative events that bookend this work. When the white man arrived at the Indians abode, he was compelled to sit through multiple courses of succotash because he no longer determined the protocols of exchange. Because he was in an unfamiliar place, the white man was forced to abide by the customs of his Indigenous host. Like the man in the story, when European colonists first arrived in North America, they were compelled to observe local practices. In this analogy, the succotash the white man was obliged to eat was akin to the agreements the settlers made with their Indigenous host. As explained in chapter one, the Narragansetts were the preeminent power in southern New England, and as such, they helped to shape and define cross-cultural exchanges. In fact, many of the early agreements forged between Indians and non-Indians throughout the region were a reaction to or outgrowth from the predominance of the Narragansetts, or what Miantinomi referred to as the “great tree.” Tracing the demographic, economic, political, and social

⁴⁸⁹ Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 3.

transformations that abetted both the rise and the downfall of the Narragansetts, as well as, delineating the consequences of these changes forms the foundation from which this investigation examines evolutions in the ways the Narragansetts understood and expressed their Indigeneity.

Moreover, the story of the white man and the old chief was indicative of the difficulties faced by many within the Narragansett community when tribal members attempted to publically reclaim and reassert their indigeneity in the early twentieth century. For example, while dining at the home of the white man, the actions of the old chief were restricted by the expectations of his host. The Indian drank with every course because that was precisely what his host assumed he would do. However, even though the white man determined the parameters under which the two men supped, he was unable to fully control the actions of his guest or entirely realize the outcome he had intended. Similarly, by the twentieth-century, cross-cultural exchanges between the Narragansetts and their white neighbors were prescribed mainly by the latter. Still, like the white man who hosted the Indian, Rhode Islanders were unable to unilaterally determine the consequences of their interactions with the region's Indigenous population, a reality evidenced when the Narragansetts paraded their modern interpretations of Indigeneity past an audience who had come to see Indians in their buckskins. Like the old chief when he ate and drank too much, the Narragansetts also operated within the traditional framework to realize their aims. However, whereas the old chief was able to save his land, by incorporating and utilizing many of the social dictums espoused by non-Indians the Narragansetts saved their community.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ I do not mean to suggest that the Narragansett sought or needed public recognition to ensure the continuance of their community and identity as Indigenous people. In fact, many tribal members remained in close association living on or around the former reservation land. However, the population was undoubtedly dwindling with tribal

In his 1999 HBO special titled *Bigger and Blacker*, comedian Chris Rock quipped, “When was the last time you met two Indians? You ain’t never met two Indians. I have seen a polar bear ride a tricycle in my lifetime. I have never seen an Indian family just chillin’ out at Red Lobster.” The joke worked because the audience—not just the close to two thousand who filled Harlem’s Apollo theater but also the millions who viewed the special on HBO—could identify with its premise. The people heard laughing and clapping in agreement attested to the fact that for many, Native Americans did seem to be comically—or tragically—absent from contemporary American society.

Rock’s query speaks to the broader issues of identity, indigeneity, and authenticity that inform this investigation. How do we—in the twenty-first century—determine who is Native American? Natives themselves employ a variety of criterion to decide tribal affiliation. Some American Indians use measures of blood quantum to certify membership. Other Indigenous groups might use community involvement or an individual’s proximity to reservation or ancestral land as gages for qualification. Still, some Indians determine association through lines of heredity. The Narragansetts use the list of individuals who the Indians agreed were entitled to recompense from the sale of reservation land in 1880. Another reality that further complicates the identification of Native Americans is the fact that—according to data taken from the 2010 census—almost half of all respondents who reported being American Indian and Alaska Native also reported being one or more other races. Hence, Identifying and authenticating the indigeneity of persons and groups remains a complicated endeavor.

members leaving in pursuit of other opportunities. Today, the federally recognized tribe boasts more than 2300 members up from the 200 or so who remained in the area by 1934.

This study examined how the Narragansetts attempted to communicate and affirm their unique identity as Indigenous persons amid shifting political, social, economic, and militarily realities. The work traced how these changes wrought evolution in both the composition and conceptualization of Narragansett tribal boundaries with the Indians at times rejecting or confirming the expectations and dictates of others. Chapter one explored how the Narragansetts—in their role as the area’s hegemonic Indigenous power—worked to define both the parameters and meaning of early cross-cultural exchanges throughout southern New England. The chapter also shows how other groups—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—sought to uproot the “great tree” as they worked to circumvent and challenge the authority of the Narragansetts. Chapter two finds the Narragansetts struggling to deal with the ramifications of a military defeat that precipitated a dramatic decline in not only the tribe’s population but also consequently its economic and political power. The chapter shows that when the Indians attempted to meet these challenges in a traditional way, by incorporating other peoples—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—into the tribe, some from outside the tribal community began to question the Indigeneity and authenticity of the Narragansetts ultimately resulting in the Indian’s detribalization. How the Olympian Ellison “Tarzan” Brown and some of his Narragansett brethren turned the runner’s physical accomplishments into meaningful, community-wide social, economic, and political advancements constituted the interpretive focus of chapter three. The chapter explained that it was the eagerness of Rhode Islanders to appropriate the Brown’s successes that inspired a public recognition of the Narragansetts’ continued existence. Finally, chapter four explained how some Narragansetts made use of the visibility afforded tribal members by the tercentenary to proclaim not only the survival but also the continued relevance of their community. The chapter also shows how certain tribal members

both incorporated and rejected widely accepted identifiers of Indigeneity as they sought to communicate the authenticity of their community. Scholars have shown that even before colonization North America was a dynamic place with Indigenous groups sometimes transforming, collapsing, and disappearing. Ultimately, then, this study illuminated how the ways in which the Narragansetts understood and communicated their Identity as Indian peoples has changed over time.

Within this context of evolving conceptualizations of Indigeneity, how did Rock expect that he could identify a Native American from across a room? The answer to this question—which the comedian eludes to further along in his set—helps to explain why, despite the fact that the Rock and the vast majority of those in the audience would not know if they had indeed met two Indians or observed an Indian family eating in a restaurant, the joke is effective. Most people assume that the others with whom they regularly interact are not Native America. The common perception that Indian peoples are generally absent in American society is not only due in part to demographic realities—in 2015 Native Americans made up two percent of the overall population—but also because the traits invoked by most Americans to identify peoples of Native American ancestry derive from antiquated stereotypes. For example, a little further along in his routine Rock complains that the organizers of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade tried to sneak some actors pretending to be Indians past him by placing feathers in their hair. The hilarity of the situation is that the wearing of feathers is so intrinsically tied to Native Americans that it was only the comedian’s discerning eye that had uncovered the ruse. However, the joke ultimately hinged on the universal expectation that Indians could be identified by the feathers in their hair. Because, as they went along in their daily lives, audience members did not regularly see people with feathers in their hair they assumed they had not interacted with or seen any

Native Americans. However, statistical analysis of the Apollo theater's capacity suggests that their might have been as many as sixteen Indians in the audience. But it is most likely that these Native spectators did not have feathers in their hair.

After hundreds of years of various cross-cultural contacts, identifying who and who is not considered to be Native American is fraught with complications. However, when Americans reduce Indigeneity to a narrow set of stereotyped identifiers and qualifiers, they obscure the fact that—whatever their percentage of the overall population—Native Americans remain a continued presence in society. This reality was not only dismissed by Rock and his audience but also by a general public that continues to only see Indians as people of the past who remain readily identifiable by the feathers the put in their hair. This investigation argues for a reexamination of those delimiting identifiers of Indigeneity.

This work opened with a discussion of the divide that existed in 2003 between the Narragansetts and the authorities charged with enforcing Rhode Island's laws. And as explained, what separated the two sides was much more than differing interpretations of state, federal, and tribal authority. Indeed, what was violently mediated in the parking lot of the smoke shop on July 14th was the legitimacy of Narragansett Indigeneity. As shown throughout this work, Rhode Islanders had long decried those who claimed to be descendants of the Narragansetts as inauthentic usurpers. Hence, the assertions made by the Indians especially their claims of sovereignty were—in the views of many—both unfounded and untenable. Within this context, the state's overwhelming use of force can be understood as an unambiguous declaration of its authority and an invalidation of the Narragansetts. For, it was not that Rhode Islanders were unaware or unsympathetic to the plights of the nation's Indigenous population. It was that many people in the state viewed the Narragansetts through the lens of a long historical narrative that

rendered those who stood and proclaimed their rights as Indian peoples on that day in mid-July as undeserving.⁴⁹¹

Hence, for those Narragansetts who stood locked arm to arm ready to oppose the advance of the officers, there was much more at stake than the revenue earned from cigarette sales. Since at least the late eighteenth century, white Rhode Islanders continually challenged the authenticity of the Narragansetts. However, tribal members often opposed attempts to invalidate their indigeneity as they endured the “sneers” and “unjust criticism” of their white neighbors while emphatically asserting that “we are the heirs of Ninigert and Miantinomi.”⁴⁹² Thus, when the Narragansetts gathered at the smoke shop, they carried with them the animosities engendered by centuries of degradation, disregard, and marginalization. And as tribal members aligned themselves along the road on that hot morning in mid-July, they did so not in opposition of Rhode Island state law but in defiance of the historical fallacies that not only shaped how others perceived their community but also influenced the decisions and policies that continue to affect the Narragansetts negatively. In short, the Narragansetts stood in 2003 for the same reasons that they championed Ellison Brown and participated in pageants some seventy years earlier, to let the world know—as the *Dawn* proclaimed in its final issue—“The NARRAGANSETT TRIBE STILL EXISTS!”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ See the editorial printed in *Providence Journal* cited in note 6 of the introduction.

⁴⁹² Redwing and Hazard, “Narragansett Dawn,” Vol.1, No. 5.

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